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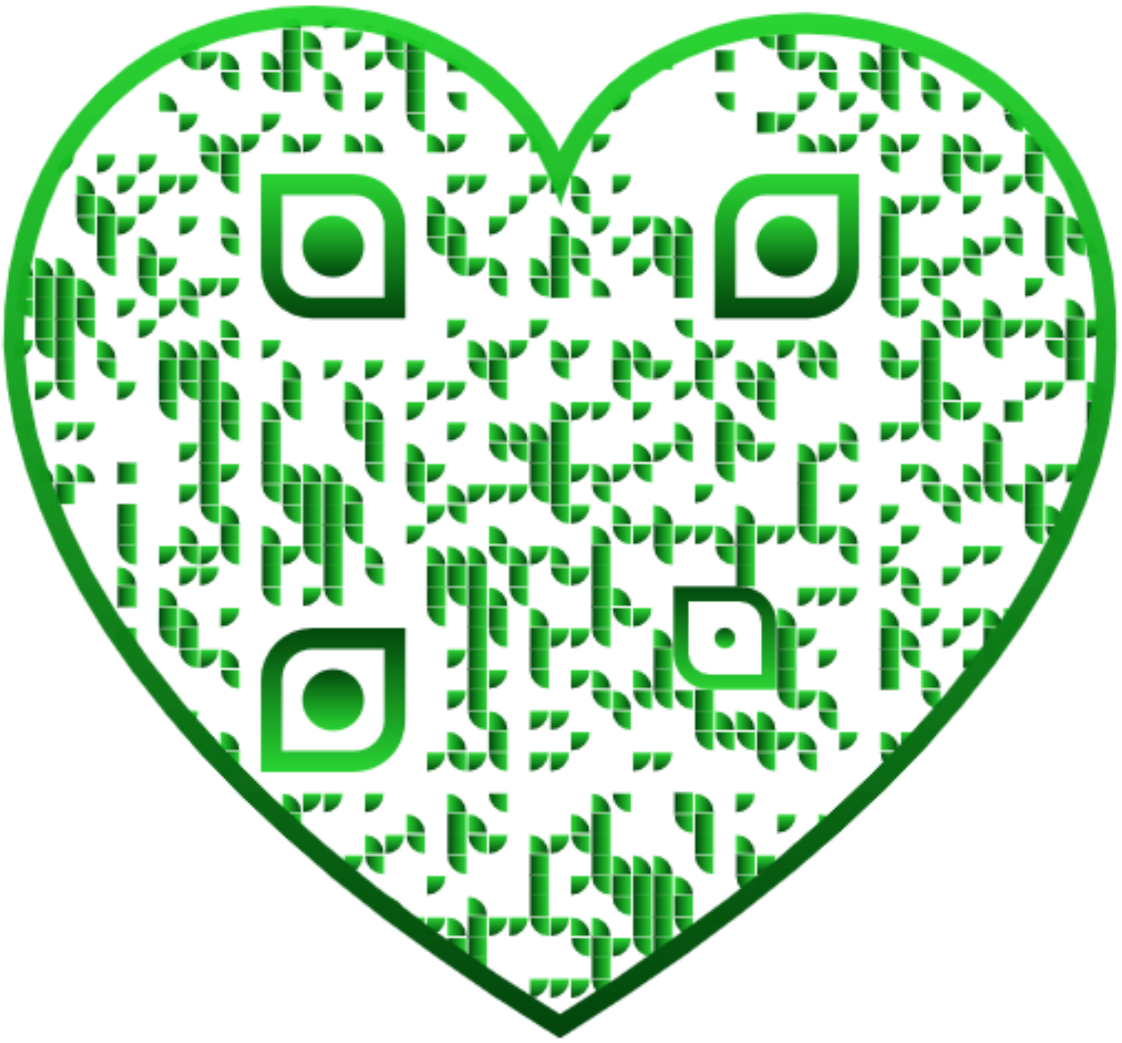

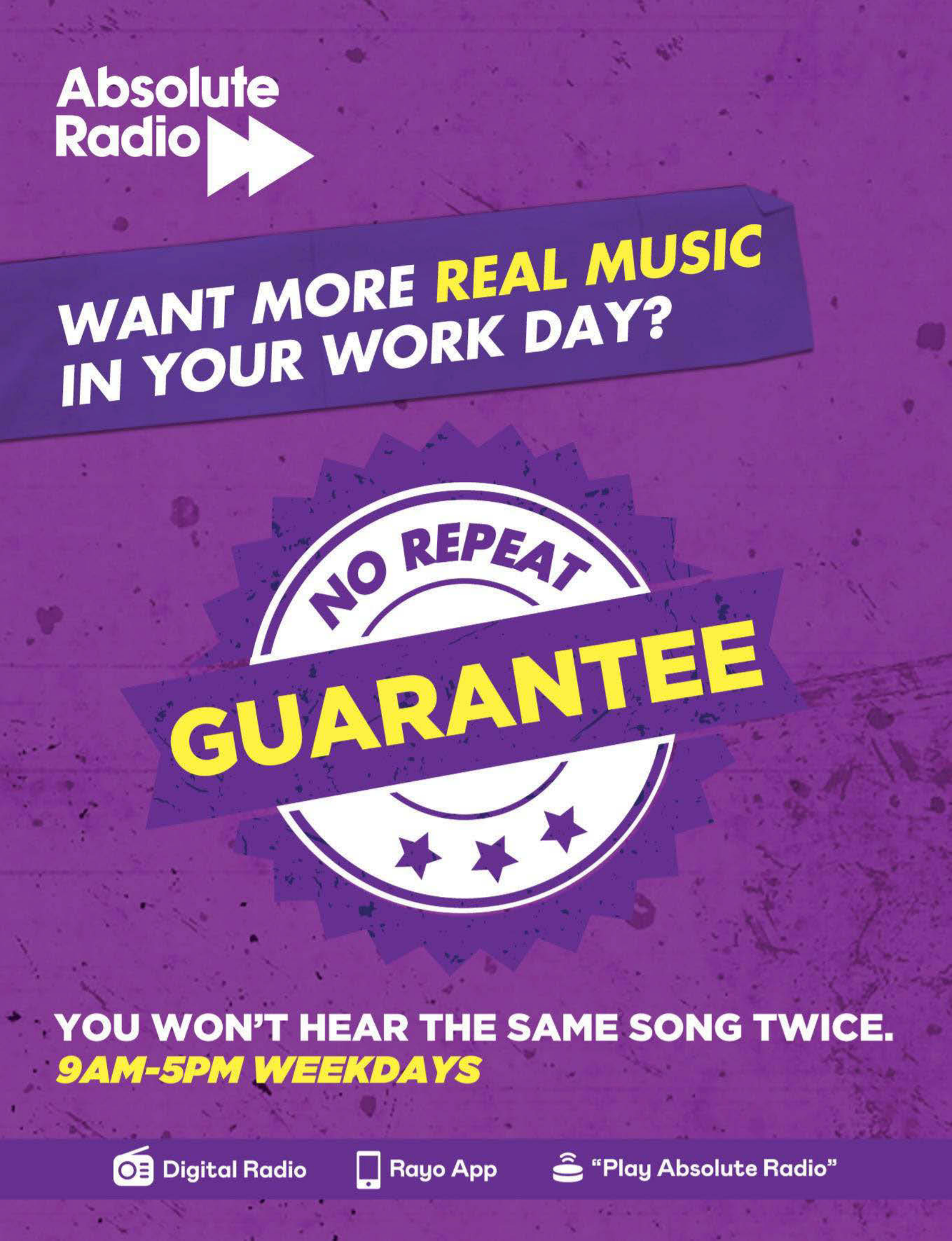
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FINALLY, THE TRAILBLAZING LEAF IS NOW MAINSTREAM

Back in 2009, I drove an innovative new vehicle at Nissan's forward-thinking development centre in Cranfield, Bedfordshire. It was a first-generation battery-powered Leaf prototype, and it promised to mark the beginning of the electric vehicle revolution. But it turns out that the nascent Leaf was even further ahead of its time than Nissan could have anticipated: EV growth would be incremental at best for at least another decade.

Love 'em or hate 'em, all that has now changed, and you'll be well aware of the vast array of EVs on offer today, not least from reading about them on these very pages. As electric vehicles have evolved, Autocar has reported on and celebrated the ways in which car companies are learning to make them dynamically – never mind technologically – more appealing, in order to attract a new generation of keen drivers.

But in the world of car buying, there has always been a heartland where the bulk of car sales go, and currently that is the mid-sized crossover segment. Which brings me back to the third-generation Leaf, which is up against two key rivals in this week's issue, on p44. I won't give away the winner, but it proves one vital thing: really good EVs are now just mainstream everyday cars that we take for granted – and if that's what you're after, there's an awful lot to commend.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk YouTube TikTok

Restomods meet: MGB versus MX-5
In a world of two-tonne SUVs, an occasional lightweight palate cleanser is in order.

The best engine noise... ever?
Join Richard Lane in a stunning Porsche Spyder RS – complete with 4.0-litre atmo flat six.

A brief history of three-wheeled cars
Messerschmitt and Morgan are just two firms to have proudly put three wheels on their wagon.

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"I am just a fat old man who has kept his fantasy as it was when I was six years old" p65

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NEWS

GOT A STORY Email our news editor will.rimell@haymarket.com

HIGH-TECH i3 HONED FOR ‘SHEER DRIVING PLEASURE’

New EV will drive like a true BMW 3 Series and offer class-leading range

The crucial new BMW i3 will arrive next year as the first fully electric member of the 3 Series family, bringing a range of more than 500 miles – and company boss Oliver Zipse has promised that it will deliver “sheer driving pleasure”.

With similar styling to that of the Vision Neue Klasse concept first shown in 2023, the new i3 will be the first saloon in the Munich firm’s revamped Neue Klasse family. It will sit on the same new bespoke electric Gen6 platform as the recently revealed iX3 SUV.

BMW is gearing up to refresh its entire line-up with 40 new EVs and heavily updated combustion cars, which all share the Neue Klasse look and are due by the end of 2027.

While the X3 SUV is now BMW’s best-seller, the 3 Series saloon remains the cornerstone of the brand – and this will be the first time an electric version has been offered. BMW has sold the similar-sized i4 four-door coupé since 2021, but it chose to wait until EV technology could deliver a closer match to combustion

New-era styling of the BMW i3 is clear, despite the camouflage

"The launch model is set to be the 50 xDrive, which is likely to offer 484bhp from a dual-motor set-up"

HOW THE 3 SERIES HAS EVOLVED

E21 1975

E30 1982

E36 1990

E46 1997

E90 2004

F30 2011

G20 2018

models before launching a battery-powered 3 Series.

While the i3 will be new, it will face some familiar rivals, with a Mercedes-Benz C-Class EV set to be launched next year (Autocar, 17 September) and an Audi A4 EV in development (Autocar, 24 September). But the i3 will also be key to taking on newer rivals such as Tesla and Chinese premium brands including BYD's Denza and Xpeng.

The i3 will be offered with a variety of power outputs – including a hot electric M3 – and the launch model is set to be a 50 xDrive, as with the iX3. It is likely to offer the same 464bhp and 479lb ft from a dual-motor set-up as the iX3, with power drawn from a 108kWh nickel-manganese-cobalt battery.

That system gives the SUV a range of 500 miles, so the more aerodynamic shape of the saloon will potentially make it the longest-range EV on sale in the UK – and should give it an edge over the C-Class EV, which, Autocar understands, will offer a 497-mile range when it arrives next year. The Gen6 platform employed by the i3 features an 800V architecture, allowing for charging speeds of up to 400kW.

The i3 will be joined by a heavily updated version of the petrol-engined 3 Series, which will remain on the unrelated CLAR architecture but will receive a makeover with the Neue Klasse design language and the latest in-car technology.

The Vision Neue Klasse saloon concept previewed how the upcoming EV and ICE 3 Series will look, with a distinctly different interpretation of BMW's kidney grille that is also destined for the iX3 and future SUVs. The camouflaged i3 prototype shown recently confirms that the EV will retain the typical 3 Series body ▶

Today's 3 Series will gain Neue Klasse styling and upgraded technology

◂ shape, with smoother lines and BMW's signature Hofmeister kink employed for the C-pillar.

Inside, the i3 will feature BMW's new Panoramic iDrive system, seen in the iX3, which mates an angled touchscreen with a projected head-up display that runs the length of the front windscreen. The company claims that this system enables key data to be displayed closer to the driver's eyeline.

Given the importance of driving dynamics to BMW, the firm's engineers have put a major focus on attempting to ensure the i3 can match the petrol 3 Series models when it comes to ride and handling. Key to that is the new centralised computing architecture, which is built around a greatly reduced number of processing chips. The set-up includes the 'Heart of Joy' system, which unites all of the driving experience controls to enable faster and more intuitive reactions (see separate story, right).

The system also essentially merges the braking and energy recuperation systems, automatically adjusting between them to offer maximum stopping power. BMW claims that 98% of retardation can be done using the energy regen system.

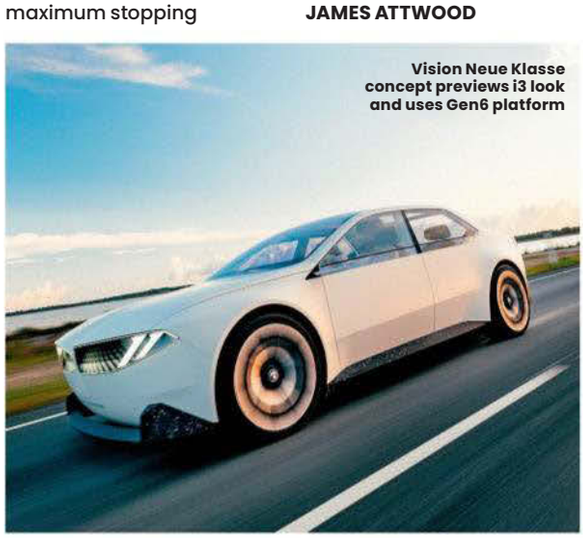
While BMW has not given official details about the full i3 line-up, BMW Group design chief Adrian van Hooydonk has confirmed that a Touring estate version will follow, along with a range of powertrain options.

After that, the first electric M3 is due in 2028 and prototype versions have already been seen testing. While it will adopt the same Heart of Joy control system, M boss Frank van Meel has previously confirmed to Autocar that it will use bespoke electric powertrain and battery components. These will be based on standard BMW components but heavily developed by the M performance division.

The electric M3 is expected to adopt a quad-motor set-up that could make it the most powerful M model yet, using advanced torque vectoring enabled by the new software architecture for control.

While the i3 is new, the model name was previously used for a pioneering and radically styled hatch, which was sold in range-extender and pure-EV forms from 2013 until 2022.

JAMES ATTWOOD


Vision Neue Klasse concept previews i3 look and uses Gen6 platform

BMW TO USE DYNAMIC NOUS TO KEEP NEW RIVALS AT BAY

THE HEART OF Joy control system in all future BMWs models will allow for an even broader range of performance – but the firm's driving dynamics chief says that it is BMW's extensive experience of physical engineering that will keep it ahead of Chinese rivals in offering truly dynamic EVs.

The new i3 and subsequent Neue Klasse EVs will use a new platform and advanced computing architecture that allows the car's systems to process information and react 10 times faster than current systems, which use a number of separate 'closed loop' systems.

Mihiar Ayoubi, BMW's senior vice-president of driving experience, told Autocar that the advent of the "digital chassis" presents "the sort of opportunity that only repeats itself every 100 years or so".

He added: "We could develop an entirely new body, which enables you to design the DNA you need to deliver good driving behaviour. Control systems can't cheat physics: if the DNA of the car, the body-in-white, is incorrect, you can't deliver [good] driving dynamics."

Ayoubi described the understanding of the body-in-white chassis as "knowledge we can't dispense with. You need that DNA and you still need a very sophisticated chassis that has both static stiffness and dynamic stiffness."

Key to controlling the physics, according to Ayoubi, is the deflection line of the car – the path the chassis takes under stress.

He said: "The ideal deflection line is a linear one, which delivers solid transient behaviour when a car is in corners.

"Introducing batteries to a car is, at first, lovely because you have a lower centre of gravity and higher stiffness. But the problem is the parts of the car in front of and behind the battery become quite 'lossy' in comparison to the centre of the car: you have a soft front, a very stiff middle and a soft rear. So you dive in with the soft first part, and this big stiff bit comes afterwards.

"What we've done now is designed the chassis to alter the deflection line and deliver predictable behaviour, which the new control

New BMWs will use Heart of Joy tech, as fitted to the Vision Neue Klasse

"We can provide a naughty car, a wild car or a wise car depending on the target group"

systems then build upon."

To control torque on traditional cars, a closed loop system on the wheels uses sensor data to monitor traction and it then sends that information to the system that controls the drivetrain response, which in turn feeds instructions to the brake and engine controllers to adjust their response.

But the Heart of Joy is a single system that gathers and responds to all the data. Ayoubi described it as "a central intelligence system like an octopus with multiple arms".

Ayoubi says this tech provides a once-in-a-century opportunity

He added that the freedom of EV powertrains offers "good and bad news. The good news is the Heart of Joy is 10 times faster. The bad news is the electric axles are also fast and deliver torque instantly, but we don't want that torque delivered to the wheels instantly. It's impressive for acceleration, but it doesn't feel great. But we can now customise that power."

The greater ability to control electric motors than with a combustion engine is also advantageous. "We can add more scope to the cars," said Ayoubi. "We can determine the characteristics of the car: we can provide a naughty car, a wild car or a wise car depending on the customer group you're targeting. We can make some people feel they're a better driver – with enough space for sophisticated drivers to enjoy their car."

BMW has developed the new software in-house, which, said Ayoubi, was a strategic decision to keep knowledge away from rivals. He said internal knowledge and experience are crucial: "When I was a young engineer, I thought you needed to have every system performing to 100%, but the customer needs only 30% of it.

"I was involved in the development of the first active anti-roll bar and we delivered zero rolling angle, so the car cornered horizontally. I was proud, but drivers and passengers hated it!

"We're trying to find the sweet spot. It took some time, because software-defined systems have a lot of parameters. We had engineers who wanted to really push it, but this old engineer said the customer wants only 30% of it."

That experience sets BMW apart from new Chinese rivals and Ayoubi said it will ensure the i3 and future models will offer superior driving dynamics: "They can do the software, and not just software. What they are doing now is putting all the chassis systems they can find on the market – air springs, active body control, brake-by-wire, steer-by-wire.

"We did all those things 25 years ago and we know the advantages and disadvantages, and we know why we won't do something like that. With the knowledge of our DNA, we can deliver much better performance."

DACIA REINVENTS PEOPLE'S

Hipster is a lightweight sub-£15k EV concept that is "not far" from production ready

Dacia has channelled the spirit of the original Mini, Fiat 500 and Volkswagen Beetle for a sub-800kg, four-seat city car concept designed to dramatically reduce the price of EVs.

Called the Hipster, it measures just 1.55m wide, 1.53m tall and three metres long – shorter than any car currently on sale – but it still has four full-sized seats and up to 500 litres of load space with the rear seats folded, which is enough to accommodate a washing machine.

Dacia's aim is to "enable as many people as possible to access essential mobility" in the face of rising costs brought about by regulation and electrification – with the Hipster envisaged as a model that undercuts even the £15,000 Dacia Spring, one of Europe's cheapest full-sized cars.

It showcases the sort of tiny, lightweight model that manufacturers could produce for the new E-car category of affordable small cars that is set to be introduced in Europe. The exact framework of this new category has yet to be determined but it is expected to relieve the strict legislative burden that has forced up the prices of modern cars.

Although the Hipster had been designed before the first details of this new class emerged, Dacia sales boss Frank Marotte told Autocar the concept shows what could be possible if manufacturers were given more freedom to build small, affordable cars profitably.

"Fundamentally, I think that the EU Commission and all the stakeholders and most of the OEMs are starting to recognise that, especially for small cars, we've [gone] too far in terms of certain types of regulations," he said. "The actual usage by customers is completely disconnected from the latest active safety regulation that has been put in place."

Marotte said that European legislators have added around 100 new safety regulations for cars since 2010 and estimated that there will be another 100-plus added between now and 2030.

Partly as a result of this increasing legislation – and all the extra equipment and materials it necessitates – the average weight of a new car is said to have risen 15% over the past decade, its power has increased by 43% to compensate and it has increased in cost by 63%.

"So our expectation is that – whether it's about safety, whether it's about technologies – we need to be more pragmatic, because we need to bring back affordable cars on the road," said Marotte.

He added that the

All four sides of the Hipster are nearly vertical, and the windscreen extends into the roof to bring more light inside.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

Sandero Stepway will gain a 154bhp hybrid powertrain next year

SANDERO TO GO HYBRID IN WIDER DACIA REVAMP

THE DACIA SANDERO will gain a hybrid powertrain as part of a round of mid-life updates for the supermini and its seven-seat Jogger sibling. The refresh will also usher in a new look for both and increase equipment across the board.

In around a year's time, Dacia will equip the range-topping Sandero Stepway with its new Hybrid 155 powertrain, which combines a 108bhp petrol four-cylinder with a 49bhp electric motor and a starter-generator for 154bhp and 125lb ft – chunky gains over the Sandero's current most powerful engine.

The same powertrain in the much larger, heavier Dacia Bigster returned

CAR AS CHEAP, CHUNKY EV

Hipster's bare-bones conception reflects an ambition to strip away any non-essential content and reduce costs.

"We need to work even harder than before on design-to-cost, and design-to-weight as well," he said. "If we can reduce the weight, then we can extend the range without over-investing in batteries, so that's really the magic work that we have to put in place."

Weighing 20% less than the Spring, the Hipster has been designed to use as few materials as possible in its construction, in line with an ambition to halve its total life-cycle carbon footprint compared with today's cleanest EVs.

A by-product of keeping the weight down is increased efficiency, and while Dacia has not released a specific battery capacity for the Hipster, it says it is "sized as needed" and would need to be charged only twice a week – based on the fact that the majority of motorists drive fewer than 24 miles per day.

Patrice Lévy-Bencheton, director of product performance, said the Hipster highlights the contrast between the perceived requirements of modern electric cars and how they are used in the real world.

"In daily driving, you don't need a 1.5- or two-tonne car with an 80kWh battery, capable of doing 0-100kph in four seconds. You don't need this," he said. "Let's just go back to the essentials: what do we really need on a daily basis?"

Design chief David Durand told Autocar the squat, blocky Hipster shows that affordable cars can also be desirable, citing iconic utilitarian 'people's cars' like the Fiat Panda, Citroën 2CV and Land Rover Series I as inspirations. He said: "For us, that's an example that we should be able to reproduce [with] this mindset, where essential becomes super-cool."

Durand said the car is "not far" from being production ready but added that the prospect of a launch is contingent on the legislative environment and market conditions.

"We have some regulation problems to solve and some answers to come from the regulators," he said. "But there is no big reason why it shouldn't be feasible at the right price, the right weight, the right everything."

FELIX PAGE

Instead of an inbuilt screen, there is a phone mount for your own device, which can use the new Dacia app for streaming, nav and so on.

Hipster's low-cost interior combines a pragmatic, function-first approach with plenty of visual interest

72.4mpg in urban driving and around 55mpg in higher-speed running during its Autocar road test.

In the meantime, the updated Sandero, Stepway and Jogger will go on sale from November and be marked out by a new LED light signature with an 'inverted T' either side of a new-look grille, plus pixel-style rear light motifs.

There are subtle changes inside too. All three models gain new-look air vents, more durable fabric trimmings, a reshaped steering wheel and a 10in central touchscreen – up from 8in before.

From right: Sandero, Stepway and Jogger will be updated in November

SPRING EV UPDATE BRINGS POWER HIKE

Dacia has dramatically raised the power output of its £15k Spring city car to make it easier to drive out of town and boost its motorway credentials.

From early next year, the Spring will come with a 69bhp motor in entry-level Expression form and a 99bhp unit in top-rung Extreme trim – up from 45bhp and 65bhp respectively.

The power boost is part of a wider update that includes a new LFP battery, an increase in maximum charging speed from 30kW to 40kW, more powerful brakes, a stability-boosting anti-roll bar and retuned suspension. Prices are expected to be similar to today's.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

WILD DB12 S TAKES V8 ASTON TO 690BHP

More power and chassis tweaks for Gaydon's V8 GT

Aston Martin has revealed a new S-badged range-topper for the DB12, with power boosted to 690bhp and a series of technical upgrades to make it more of a hardcore proposition.

The DB12 S joins the Vantage S and recently released DBX S as the latest member of the S-badged line of high-performance Aston Martin flagships.

Changes have been made to the powertrain, steering and electronics to increase the DB12's pace and sharpen its handling.

Aston Martin's director of vehicle performance Simon Newton said the raft of tweaks (outlined below) gives "exceptional scope to explore a new depth of character and capability within the same platform".

Pricing has yet to be revealed but, like the DBX S and the standard DBX 707, the DB12 S is expected to start at the same £200,000 as the standard car. It will be available as a coupé and a roadster. Deliveries are due to begin early next year.

WILL RIMELL

Chassis changes have been made to increase the "sense of agility", cornering confidence and overall balance. This includes new damper tuning, a stiffer rear auto-roll bar and recalibrated steering.

The 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8's output has been increased by 19bhp to 690bhp. This cuts the 0-62mph sprint time to 3.4sec; top speed stays at 202mph.

New quad-pipe exhaust is key visual differentiator between S and standard DB12. A new front splitter, bonnet scoops and fixed rear spoiler also showcase the car's performance credentials.

SUPER BENTLEY CONFIRMED

Bentley has confirmed the imminent return of the Continental Supersports, following Autocar's exclusive report that the brand was set to launch a new rear-driven, V8-engined flagship with more than 640bhp.

RZ HERALDS STEER-BY-WIRE

The updated Lexus RZ is on sale at £53,995, or £67,795 for the new 550e F Sport variant. The first car offered in Europe with steer-by-wire tech, it also gets a fake manual gearbox, similar to the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N.

Quad tailpipes and a fixed spoiler mark out the DB12 S from the rear

DB12 S is 1.5dB louder than the standard car owing to a more "potent" optional stainless steel exhaust.

Steering and electronic changes give the DB12 S an enhanced "sense of agility"

S EXPRESSES: WHEN ASTON LETS LOOSE

DB3 S
Road racer created in 1953 was the first Aston S.

DBX S
Most potent S yet: 717bhp from DB12's V8.

V12 Vantage S
Now revered as a classic: 510bhp, 6.0-litre naturally aspirated V12, manual.

Rapide S
Four-door four-seater was charming, refined and eccentric GT.

JLR was forced to shut its production lines at the beginning of September

JLR SET TO RESTART PRODUCTION LINES

JLR WAS PREPARING to build its first cars in more than a month when Autocar went to press last week.

While an exact time for the restart of production lines was unclear, it was expected to begin by today (8 October).

Speaking to Autocar last Friday, a spokesperson reiterated that production would resume "in the coming days". They added that restart assessments were being carried out daily.

The British car maker was still working to recover from a cyber attack that brought its factories to a halt on 1 September.

The hack incapacitated the Land Rover maker, forcing it to shut down its internal computer systems in an effort to protect data from being stolen.

This in turn resulted in production shutdowns at all of its global plants and created issues with parts ordering and affected suppliers and retailers.

The impact on volumes will be made clear when the company releases its production numbers for the quarter. In the three months to the end of September last year, it produced more than 80,000 cars.

The effect could be costing JLR up to £5 million a day, business economics professor David Bailey told Autocar previously.

RENAULT HACK

The personal data of some UK Renault and Dacia owners and customers has been stolen in a cyber attack.

The hack was carried out on an unnamed third-party data processing provider used by the Renault Group's UK arm. No Renault Group UK systems were compromised.

In a statement last Friday, Renault UK confirmed this was an isolated incident that "has been contained".

TOYOTA GR YARIS RETURNS AS £49K LIMITED EDITION

TOYOTA HAS BROUGHT the GR Yaris back to the UK with an aggressive new special edition – and it is offered solely in manual gearbox form.

Priced from £48,995 (£2950 more than the regular car), the Aero Performance sports a more menacing look, with new ducts and vents to improve the car's aerodynamics. It also features a rally-style vertical handbrake lever.

The 276bhp, four-wheel-drive hardcore hatch will be produced in undefined "strictly limited numbers" and is only available via Toyota GR Centres.

Deliveries will begin next March.

OFFICIAL PICTURE

HONDA TO UNVEIL TWO EVs

Honda will show a new small electric car at the Tokyo motor show. It is expected to be a development of the Super EV concept (pictured). Honda will also display a new 0 Series EV, most likely an entry-level SUV.

BABY DEFENDER OUT TESTING

This is our clearest look yet at the baby Land Rover Defender. Conceived as a rival to Mercedes-Benz's incoming mini G-Class, the luxurious compact 4x4 could be launched as soon as 2027.

SPY SHOT

AUDI READIES ENTRY EV WITH A2-INSPIRED LOOK

All-new model will arrive next year and be sold alongside the larger A3

Audi has begun testing a new entry-level model that is set to indirectly replace the A1 and Q2 when they are retired next year.

The new EV will be the smallest car that Audi offers and is set to be positioned as a rival to the BMW iX1 and upcoming second-gen Mercedes-Benz GLA EV.

Spotted by Autocar spy photographers for the first time, the EV looks like a smaller version of the Q4 E-tron but shows clear visual influence from the A2 of 1999-2005.

Because the new EV won't serve as a direct replacement for any existing model, it could be assigned a new name – and a resurrection of the long-dormant A2 badge is one possibility.

Speaking previously to Autocar, Audi CEO Gernot Döllner wouldn't confirm any future naming plans but said it was "thinkable" that the brand could

A2 was made from 1999-2005 and has since gained a cult following

POLESTAR TO PUSH DRIVER APPEAL IN FUTURE CARS

New 7, the first car from the Römers era, will be a sleek, squat crossover

POLESTAR DESIGN CHIEF Philipp Römers says the firm will expand the use of physical buttons in future models as part of efforts to build on the brand's performance appeal.

The former Audi head of exterior design moved to the Swedish EV firm at the start of this year, replacing BMW-bound Max Missoni. Römers has now outlined his vision for the brand to Autocar, indicating that he will evolve Polestar's current design language rather than take a revolutionary approach.

Römers hinted that future models will be lower and sleeker to emphasise their driver appeal and suggested that the dashboard will also become more driver-focused, moving away from the centrally mounted touchscreen. Those efforts will also include introducing more buttons.

"We want to express the topic of performance, and bringing buttons back is vital to become a proper driver's car," Römers told Autocar. "At the moment, there is learning all over the industry [about buttons]. We are always talking internally about the perfect balance.

"We should not go completely back, and maybe in the future with AI you could even get rid of some of the displays and just have a few buttons. But for now we have to find a good balance. We are talking about a car which is moving, after all."

The design of the 5 super-saloon – and the mothballed 6 roadster – were signed off before Römers arrived so the Polestar 7 crossover, due

redeploy historic names.

While technical details remain under wraps, the new EV is expected to sit on the Volkswagen Group's MEB platform, which underpins a raft of EVs such as the Volkswagen ID 3, Q4 E-tron, Ford Capri and Cupra Tavascan.

Given its size and positioning – straddling the boundary between hatchback and crossover – it is likely to have similar dimensions to Skoda's Elroq.

That car is offered with battery packs of 58kWh to 79kWh and, in its most efficient form, can travel up to 360 miles on a single charge. The sporty vRS version puts out 335bhp.

Unlike the Elroq, the new Audi will be a premium offering in the segment. Döllner previously said: "There are not many brands in the world [that can], but I think Audi can have a true premium offer in the A-segment."

The decision to replace the A1 and Q2 with a single model is part of "a wider Audi move to simplify the model line-up", according to Döllner.

The new EV will be the smallest car that Audi will offer, said Döllner, adding that smaller segments "will be utilised by other brands and the group" – models such as the VW ID Polo, VW ID Cross, Cupra Raval and Skoda Epiq.

This will allow Audi to "focus on a specific portfolio" that will bring "a more focused and a clearer view for the customer", said Döllner.

WILL RIMELL

"It will be positioned as a rival to the BMW iX1 and Mercedes-Benz GLA EV"

Tipped to use the MEB platform, new EV will be Audi's smallest car

SPY SHOTS

Side silhouette and rear echo the styling of the aerodynamic A2

in 2028, will be the firm's first production car created under his leadership. But Römers indicated that he is aiming to showcase his vision before then with a concept car.

He insisted there is no firm timeline for any concept car and wouldn't give details of what sort of model it would be.

But Römers said: "In a design-driven company such as Polestar, you need from time to time to showcase some show cars, to inspire and show the next steps of the brand."

■ **FULL INTERVIEW, P50**

GENESIS SHOWS HOT GV60

Genesis has shown the first official picture of its GV60 Magma performance EV ahead of its launch in the coming months – and it sports a chunky rear wing.

The car will top the GV60 line-up and is the first in a new range of performance flagships for all of the brand's model lines.

The GV60 Magma builds on the standard GV60 with a more aggressive front end and a lower, wider bodykit. It is expected to adopt the same underpinnings as the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N, including a 89.0kWh battery and 641bhp dual-motor powertrain.

OFFICIAL PICTURE

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE

BMW's third-gen fuel cell system will enter production in 2028

COULD BMW BE THE FIRST TO MAKE FCEVs TRULY VIABLE?

GLANCE AT THE picture above and you'd be forgiven for thinking this was a new combustion engine, but although it is an engine of sorts, it's actually BMW's third-generation fuel cell system. Due to enter series production in 2028, it will be "a milestone in automotive history", says BMW, and "the first-ever series production fuel cell electric vehicle (FCEV) to be offered by a global premium manufacturer". It may be the first from a premium manufacturer but other FCEV makers include partner and fuel cell development veteran Toyota, which launched the Mirai in 2014 and started developing FCEVs in 1992.

There have been others too, and although they were only available for use in trials, they proved viable, such as the Mercedes A-Class-based Necar 4, which was launched in 1999 as the first road-legal fuel cell car, and the 2002 Honda FCX-V4. Both, along with many others since, were highly finished, excellent to drive and plausible cars, but here we are a quarter of a century later still waiting for the magic to happen.

Maybe the new BMW will crack it, and while naysayers may insist hydrogen will never succeed, the continued investment of major firms like BMW and Toyota suggests otherwise. For fuel cell cars to take off, there needs to be a refuelling infrastructure and that looks to be on the way in Europe. BMW says the EU's Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation will establish a comprehensive network of larger, new-generation, 700-bar refuelling stations by 2030, capable of meeting the demands of trucks, buses and cars. Think of an FCEV as a petrol hybrid but with a fuel cell system replacing the combustion engine. Refuelling one is just as fast as filling an ICE car.

At the heart of a hydrogen fuel cell system is the fuel cell stack, comprising hundreds of individual small fuel cells in the same way an EV battery pack is made up of lithium ion cells. BMW's latest fuel cell system has been jointly developed by BMW and Toyota whereas its first-generation fuel cell system fitted to the 535iA in 2014 was supplied entirely by Toyota. The second generation installed in the existing iX5 pilot fleet was developed by BMW using individual cells in the stack supplied by Toyota.

The new system occupies 25% less space, thanks to a notable increase in power density over the previous generation. It can be seamlessly integrated into future vehicle architectures and is more efficient than previous versions in terms of power and energy use.

Prototypes are being built at BMW's competence centre for hydrogen in Munich, Germany, and series production will start at the BMW Group's plant in Steyr, Austria, in 2028.

BMW is currently testing its new hydrogen fuel cell set-up in prototypes

CITROEN POISED TO REVEAL NEW FUTURE DIRECTION

CEO hints at what to expect when the French firm sets out its vision in December

Citroën will showcase its future design and brand direction in December.

New CEO Xavier Chardon will use an event in Paris to outline his vision for Citroën and to address observations that the brand is currently lacking clarity.

Speaking for the first time since rejoining Citroën from the Volkswagen Group in the summer, Chardon accepted there is confusion around the brand but insisted it is still able to innovate.

Separately to the December event, Chardon has continued with the project that seeks to revive a model in the spirit of the 2CV, which Citroën executives have been hinting at this year.

He said the 2CV is "a part of French culture" and he is well read on the history of the model and its original purpose to democratise cars for people with limited buying power. He said it is "my duty to take this brief to 2025, 2026 because it's super-important to make individual mobility affordable again".

The "DNA and spirit" of the 2CV is something "we want to inject into our future cars", he said.

It is too early to speak of the timing for such a car or cars with this ethos, said Chardon, and the project is as much about a mantra and approach to making a new model as a retro-inspired recreation of the original, because the 2CV's shape came about for functional reasons that may not be relevant today.

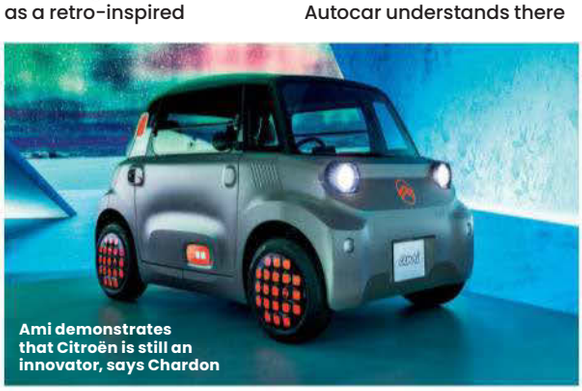
"It was the first experience of having access to individual mobility and freedom. This is the kind of freedom we have to reinvent from 2026-2030," he said.

When asked if these areas will be topics at the December event, Chardon said: "Some of them, yes. Maybe not all of them." Autocar understands there will not be a 2CV-inspired model this year.

More broadly, Chardon didn't say how many models Citroën's range will offer. He cited Tesla as showing you can have success with just two, so instead it is about having "the right shape, the right answer" and ensuring "it's clear to people". The brand's core offerings will, however, remain in the B- and C-segments.

When asked if the new Fiat Grande Panda shows greater character and is bolder in its approach than its Citroën C3 platform twin, Chardon said the two models have different purposes and approaches. The Fiat "has maybe better connection to its DNA" while the Citroën is more focused

"The E-car proposal makes a lot of sense for Citroën"


Ami demonstrates that Citroën is still an innovator, says Chardon

Relatively recent C1 city car shows the E-car idea fits Citroën's main ethos

C5 Aircross has been redesigned to be Citroën's new flagship

on space and comfort. He added: "Offering this space is super-important for us."

He highlighted the Ami as a model that shows Citroën is still a "true innovator". At the other end of its range, the C5 Aircross has been repositioned as a larger flagship and the fact that Citroën's flagship is now an SUV rather than a saloon reflects market trends.

The likely introduction of a new 'E-car' category – as mooted by the European Commission last month to allow companies to make smaller cars again without such a strict legislative framework pushing prices up – presents a "strong opportunity" for Citroën.

"First of all, it's an opportunity for Europe to democratise cars," he said. "If you look at pre- and post-Covid, the only region that hasn't recovered worldwide is Europe.

"We lost two million cars. Out of those, roughly one million are below €15,000 [£13,000]. This is driven by a lot of regulations, by a lot of pressure to reduce CO_2, which is still good, but we strongly believe there is a necessity to reconnect with those people who cannot buy new cars and either stay on the used market or keep their cars for longer.

"That's why the car parc is ageing and why the CO_2 emissions are not moving [down] according to our expectations. And that's why this E-car is a super proposal.

"We believe that bringing something close to [Japan's] kei car, being affordable, electric and made in Europe, makes sense. And it makes a lot of sense for Citroën.

"It's in our footprint. You don't have to go too far back to find the C1 as a great example.

"I do hope that we can be able to produce those cars again and it is definitely territory for Citroën."

MARK TISSHAW

Project to create a car inspired by the spirit of the 2CV is continuing

Q&A PIERRE LECLERCQ, HEAD OF DESIGN, CITROEN

What era of design is Citroën in?
"We don't have to look to the past. What's important is we keep the same philosophy of creativity, try to find solutions and try to make people's lives better. Honestly, that's what I think we've done with products like the Ami but all the way to the C5 Aircross, where we really think of customers and try to make something that is different."

What future does a modern 2CV have? Is that a live project?
"We tried it. But is it something that's going to come out or not? I'm not sure, to be honest."

Do you think the car industry has gone a bit far with touchscreens in interiors?
"If you put in a screen, it has to be really, really usable. It shouldn't become dangerous. We know using our phone in the car is dangerous and using the screen can be dangerous from time to time. You have to make sure it is very easy to use – and some physical buttons and also voice control are super-helpful."

Are things like touchscreens cyclical and might we see a car firm do away with them and just go for buttons?
"Maybe we could and that would be a great concept. Why not? Navigation, though, on a screen is something that is super-useful. I don't want to go back to a paper map."

Is there room for a really bold and more 'out there' Citroën again?
"There is room and there must be room for cars like [that]. Cars that are very strong in terms of image. I think the Ami is extreme, not that it's the biggest part of our business, but it's so important for the brand. I think it's a car that is 200% the DNA of the brand."

Is the message about what Citroën stands for well enough known? Does the brand need to tell its story more?
"I think we have great energy with the brand. For me, the positioning and the direction is very, very clear. But can we be a bit louder? Maybe, yes, but we know exactly where we want to go. That's a good thing already."

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Chardon has returned to Citroën as CEO after 14 years at the VW Group

WHEN XAVIER CHARDON left Citroën for the Volkswagen Group in 2011 after 17 years, he didn't expect to return.

A Frenchman from the Alpine region, Chardon felt it was job done at Citroën, having helped reshape the logo and modernise the brand, so he lived out a "mid-life crisis at 40" by heading to Wolfsburg.

Having gone on to hold major global roles such as leading VW's joint venture with MG owner SAIC in China, he's back to reshape Citroën all over again.

Chardon believes Citroën has "lost a bit of direction" in recent years and there has been "a bit of confusion" over the brand's positioning and a lack of consistency in its product line-up.

An ageing model range has also contributed to a loss of market share and the brand has had a "couple of issues on the quality side" in relation to the Takata airbag recall and problems with older Puretech engines.

Speaking 100 days after taking up the CEO role at Citroën, Chardon said some things have already been fixed "but we have to show that Citroën is back and that we have a brighter future".

Chardon said it is important for Citroën to "not define the brand against competitors" but instead to "define the brand to satisfy and anticipate what customers want" from it.

Chardon's four years in China with VW taught him to "respect the quality and technology" coming from Chinese brands with low-priced models that are often spoken about as posing a 'threat' to legacy makers such as Citroën.

"What is really important is to fight back with your DNA and with strong products. This is the best way to be offensive," said Chardon.

Citroën will continue to focus on comfort and offering "more roominess at a more affordable price" than rivals. Its response to quality issues has been to introduce an eight-year warranty across its range.

On the Takata airbag recall campaign, which has affected more than 1.1 million cars, Chardon said the brand is more than three-quarters of the way through it and has provided 40,000 courtesy cars across Europe to ensure customers are not without vehicles.

The C5 Aircross launch was also delayed to ensure it was 100% ready for production and to avoid any teething issues for early cars in customer hands.

"We are super-strict on these elements [on quality] and let's say it's back to the foundations of what we need to do," said Chardon.

The recall has given Citroën a chance to speak to customers it may never have talked to before, such as those who bought their cars used – once they're over the shock and being "quite emotional when you get a letter saying to stop driving. But at the same time, they are happy to see there's still a car maker behind them after 10 years."

"We have to show that Citroën is back and that we have a bright future"

Dual-rotor motor is compact; testing is under way at the Salzburgring

TECH START-UP ON CUSP OF EV BREAKTHROUGH

Munich firm tests next-gen in-wheel motor and radical dual-rotor motor

Deepdrive, a Munich-based electric motor research company, has begun public trials of a range of in-wheel automotive drive motors that, it claims, can bring new standards of efficiency and economy to car propulsion.

The new motors, being tested initially in Volvo and Tesla prototypes on the Salzburgring racing circuit, will eventually allow manufacturers to build EVs that are up to 20% more efficient, and with much greater space efficiency enabling "never seen" proportions, according to the firm.

Speaking at the recent Munich motor show, chief engineer Alex Rosen, one of the founders of Deepdrive, told Autocar that the company plans to scale up for "small series" car production by 2028 and has customers waiting for its products.

It has already acquired around €50 million (£43.5m) in investment funding from backers such as Volkswagen and BMW to assist in the establishment of pilot production facilities.

Rosen acknowledged previous problems of weight and complexity with in-wheel motors but said Deepdrive's research and innovations have reduced these to a point where production is feasible and economic.

Deepdrive was formed in 2021 by a group of seven ambitious young engineers, most of whom already knew one another through their participation in a Formula Student team at university in Munich.

After graduation, the partners began working for very large German technology groups and they were "obsessed" by what they saw as the huge potential of in-wheel drive motors. However, they became frustrated by their employers' sheer size and consequent slowness to innovate and Deepdrive was formed as a result.

"Developing in-wheel motors was our original big idea," says Rosen. "We believed – and still do – that the potential was huge, even if rival EV drive systems have upped their game over the past four years.

Deepdrive's in-wheel motor is highly efficient

"When we started, the efficiency of conventional on-board EV drive systems was awful. Most were affected by around 40% of losses associated with heat and transmission friction. Today, it's more like 25%, but this still leaves us a huge margin to work with."

"As well as energy efficiency, in-wheel motors have other big advantages," says Rosen. "We can deliver great performance, very accurate torque vectoring and we can save packaging space. All-wheel drive is almost a given and so is very effective regenerative braking."

More recently, Deepdrive has also developed and patented a unique form of dual-rotor motor, much lighter than the two single-rotor motors it can replace but nevertheless more suitable than in-wheel motors for what Rosen terms "central drive", a conventional on-board location.

Rosen acknowledges that the theory of twin-rotor motors isn't new but says Deepdrive is first to develop technology to make it work.

As well as being compact and thus easy to fit into a small, relatively light car, Deepdrive's twin-rotor motor has impressive price advantages because of materials efficiency, says Rosen, saving on copper and iron, and using fewer magnets.

Deepdrive has already run tests with the new twin-rotor motor in BMW cars, with tech giant Continental taking a keen interest.

"There's a lot more room for innovation," says Rosen. "We believe our motor can get even more compact and lighter, and save even more on materials. You'll hear more about it soon."

STEVE CROPLEY

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

Cropley wants to recreate the fun he had in our 309 racer

MONDAY

Last week's motorsport fun (I ran Autocar's electric Renault 5 in a Cornwall sprint) sent me into one of those urgent moods of car desire that stay with you after you've had a really good time.

Sprints and hillclimbs suit me and my sons, and over 30 years we've had about a dozen cars, but the best fun by far was a nicely set-up Peugeot 309 GTi that started as an Autocar project car bought on eBay for £250. Naturally, after I got home last weekend, I started scrabbling about for 309s, remembering that steering, that gearbox, that exhaust note and that all-pervading enjoyment. Short answer? There aren't any. Not at under £10,000, at least. And that's before you consider the mods we would need: cage, seats, harnesses, suspension alterations, proper tyres and brakes and a Quaife low-ratio limited-slip differential, which made our 130bhp feel more like 150-160bhp, even if it limited our top speed, hard up against the 7000rpm rev limiter, to 106mph (as measured on Autocar's timing gear).

The good news is that Peugeot 205s are a bit more plentiful; the bad news (for bank manager and Steering Committee) is that I've got an urgent taste for building a motorsport hobby car again.

Let's hope EU's E-cars will be as characterful as Japan's kei cars

"The EU authorities have been so positive and open-minded"

TUESDAY

A tale of two black cabs. For the first leg of a two-mile London journey, I stepped into a spacious LEVC range-extender, about a year old, which ran extremely smoothly and, contrary to my memories of taxi suspensions, rode as if the dampers were definitely made this century. The driver entertained me with tales of how he had hated the electric models at first but now loved 'em and left home every morning having charged his battery via solar cells on the roof of his house.

My journey back was different: in the back of a sorry old diesel LTI TX-something with a faded "proudly made in Coventry" sticker on the window, the ride comfort of a wheelbarrow and quadraphonic suspension rattles. I used to feel a bit sentimental about these old things, but for this one I'd have paid a one-way fare to the scrapper.

WEDNESDAY

We're all relieved to hear that JLR has secured a government-guaranteed £1.5 billion loan to help it cope with the huge, well-chronicled damage to its business caused by a hacking group, but a number of very large questions continue to arise.

First, who is pursuing these criminals? If a gang stole Land Rover's stock of fanbelts, the rozzers would surely be on them like a flash. It's possible that the hackers are actually being paid for their activity; nobody has said they aren't.

Second, what is Jaguar's response to the collapsing sales of large electric luxury saloons – cars like its own forthcoming three-model range and the Porsche Taycan, whose Volkswagen Group parent is currently spending billions to *not* build big EVs on the previous schedule?

For years, JLR has preferred to play a dead bat when it comes to informing the people it hopes will eventually buy its cars. Can't work forever.

FRIDAY

Who would have expected the EU authorities to be so positive and open-minded about a new breed of small, low-cost, all-European electric cars, designed to give local manufacturers the tools to repair their own market demand?

As a long-term admirer of Japan's kei cars, I'm hoping we can now look forward to a plethora of bold, original designs, colours, textures and characters that simply wouldn't be allowable in the sober ranks of traditionally pricey and luxurious marques. In my dreams, E-cars might even provide new impetus for a simple strain of kit cars, like the Lotus Seven all those years ago.

AND ANOTHER THING

It was my delight this week to take part in a live discussion with author Peter Grimsdale about his latest car book, Superveloce: How Italian Cars Conquered the World. Grimsdale told a story about being inspired by the all-conquering performance of Alfa Romeos in the first-ever Formula 1 race, in 1950 at Silverstone. The Italians had just lost the war and their factories had been flattened by Allied bombing, but they still thrashed the British. How on earth did they manage it?

GET IN TOUCH
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PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

The average car in the UK is the oldest it has ever been. That's the headline from the RAC Foundation, which has found that, as of the end of last year, the average car in the UK was nine years and 10 months old. Nearly a decade ago, at the end of 2015, the average age of a car was only seven years and five months.

For petrol and diesel cars, perhaps obviously, their average age is even older: 10 years and four months and 10 years and one month respectively. Pluggable cars are much younger.

What's the cause? The RAC Foundation thinks a few things. For one, cars are able to last longer.

"The days of them rusting away before your eyes are well and truly behind us," said Steve Gooding, the transport research charity's director. "Even a 20-year-old car with a full service history can be a good bet for someone seeking a bargain buy that still looks up to date."

I know this to be true. The average age of my family's four daily drivers is just under 20 years old, none of them has needed any welding, and yet with minimal servicing we expect the Audi, Volkswagen and Mazda to pass an MOT test without much bother (the Land Rover Defender, as something of a specialist grotbox, is a little different, but nothing it has needed so far has been structural).

But the underlying truth is that an ageing fleet is inevitable when new car sales aren't keeping pace with two other things: the number of people in the country and likelihood of them owning a car, both of which have increased steadily through this century.

In 2000, there were approximately 0.48 vehicles on the road for every person in the UK. By the middle of 2024, that was 0.57 vehicles.

Even after 20 years, many modern cars are still going strong

(I say 'approximately' because it will be slightly higher: the total number of cars registered in Northern Ireland wasn't logged until 2014, so those aren't included in the calculations. There are now about a million.)

In 2000, the UK population was 58.9 million, and between us we drove 28.6 million vehicles. By 2024, those figures had risen to 69.2 million people and 40.1 million vehicles: 40.2% more vehicles spread between 17.5% more people.

Of course, then, cars are getting older, because, like houses or GP appointments, there aren't enough new ones to go around.

It's a story, I guess, of the success of the car: it remains not just an object of desire but must also be the lowest-cost, most flexible form of transport for vast numbers of people.

"Like houses, there aren't enough new cars to go around"

But it also seems to be a story of so much else failing catastrophically. Are rail and bus services 17.5% better than they were at the turn of the millennium to accommodate the population growth and give those who don't really want to drive an alternative? If you can't get a seat on an expensive train in the day and it doesn't run at night (notwithstanding the fact that it might not go from where you are to where you want to go when you want to go there), it's no wonder that you will drive a car.

Yet have you then noticed a 40% increase in major road capacity so that those who do need to drive can? No, nor have I.

Road agencies have had to try to find ways (smart motorways, traffic lights on roundabouts, roving traffic officers) to fit more cars into the same amount of space, but I fear it's a losing battle when we're talking these numbers. And when that doesn't work and roads are overcapacity, as so many are, it takes longer to go anywhere.

So productivity stalls, that limits tax money for infrastructure investment and so the cycle goes on. All recent governments have had some kind of build-related slogan ('build, build, build' in 2020, 'build, baby, build' this year), but they have mostly been focused on houses, seldom the need to travel quickly and cheaply between those and our places of work and fun.

So the gradual 'enshittification' of longer journey times and lousier infrastructure goes on. It's the vibe one feels, all encompassed by one simple statistic: cars are getting older. At least they are up to the task.

GET IN TOUCH
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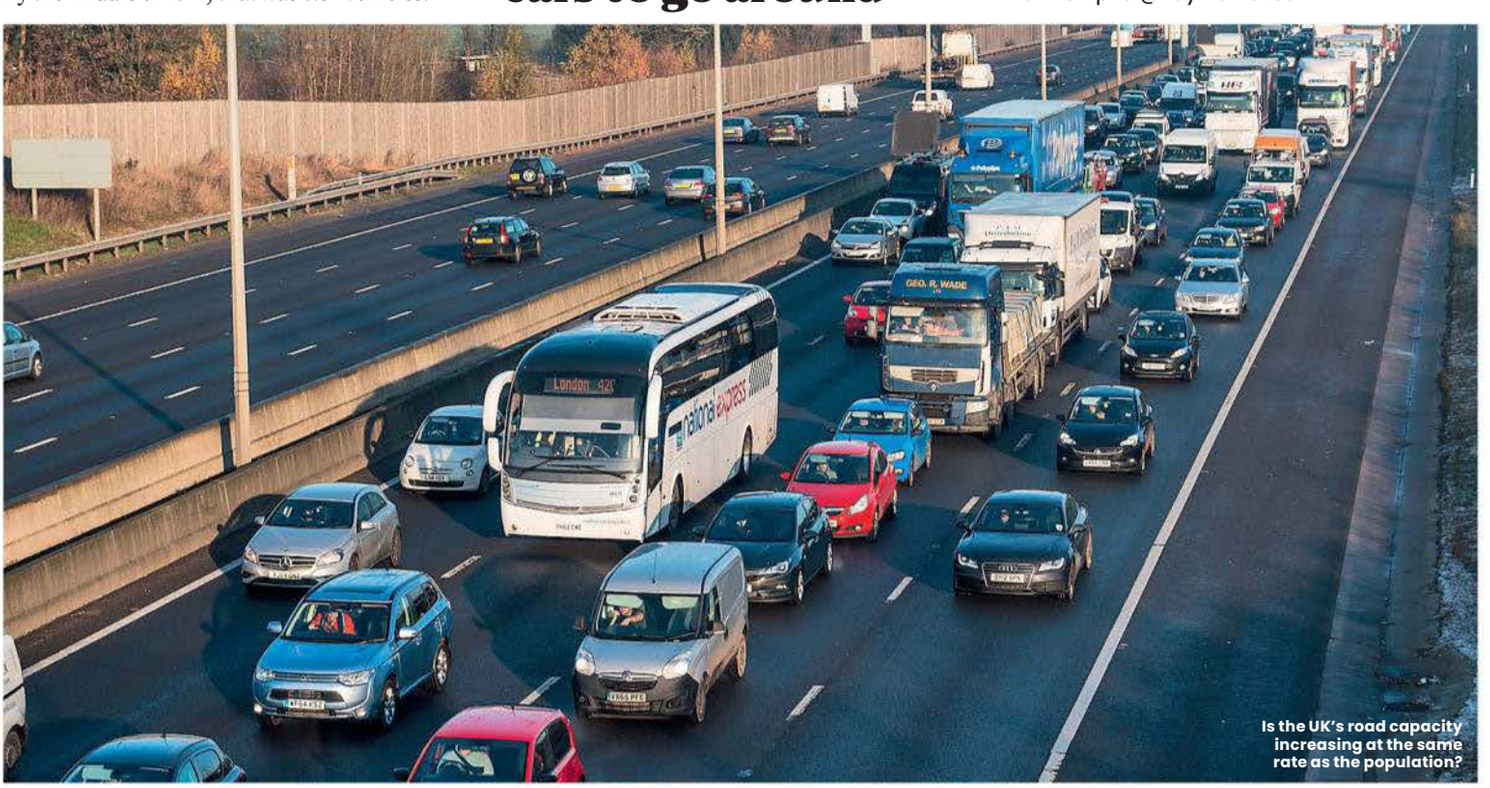


Is the UK's road capacity increasing at the same rate as the population?

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

F1's reigning champion took the lead at turn one on Nürburgring GT3 debut

For the sheer love of racing: that's what it's all about for Max Verstappen, who has won another dose of respect by claiming an emphatic victory on his GT3 sports car debut at the greatest, most challenging circuit in the world.

Three days before his 28th birthday and on a supposed weekend off in the wake of consecutive Formula 1 wins at Monza and in Baku, the four-time world champion rolled out on to the Nürburgring Nordschleife in a Ferrari 296 GT3. He had already allegedly lapped under record pace around the 12.94-mile circuit back in May under the pseudonym Franz Hermann and last month earned credit for his humility in playing by the book to earn his permit to race GT3 machinery on the Nordschleife, in a detuned Porsche 718 Cayman GT4. Now he relished the chance to be properly let off the leash.

Verstappen joined the GT3 fray for a four-hour round of the Nürburgring Langstrecken-Serie in an Emil Frey Racing-run Ferrari 296 GT3 co-driven by a friend of his, 22-year-old Brit Chris Lulham. Naturally, fans turned out en masse to witness the moment. From third on the grid, Verstappen comfortably took the lead into the Turn 1 hairpin and over a two-hour stint coolly opened up a gap of around a minute. Lulham then took over and steered the Ferrari home 24.5sec clear of a Ford Mustang GT3 driven by a crew that included gamer turned Nürburgring specialist Jann Mardenborough.

That the outcome wasn't really a surprise says it all: we know Verstappen is a natural-born racer and one of the best in history. Of course he could turn his hand to driver-friendly GT3 cars and win first time out. Had he been born half a century earlier, he would have been happy – actually, probably happier than he is today – to have raced week in, week out in all manner of competition cars, just as F1 stars always used to.

The question is: what's next? The full-fat Nürburgring 24 Hours, next year if possible, is first on the list. But then what? F1 remains Verstappen's priority – but only for now. Having achieved so much so young, he has always been open about his eagerness to sample a wider competitive palette. Chasing Lewis Hamilton's F1 win record of 105? Already on 67 (writing ahead of the Singapore GP), in theory it's in range. But he says it doesn't really interest him – and I believe him. Records and trophy trinkets are great if they come, but they aren't why Verstappen goes racing. His Nürburgring adventure is evidence of that, embarked upon purely for the (green) hell of it.

He doesn't always set a great example to his peers – not that he cares about that responsibility. But this time, let's hope others take a leaf.

"Let's hope others take a leaf from Verstappen"

A FRENCH ONE-TWO

Long-awaited and much-needed success (and relief) for the French: Alpine led Peugeot home in a chaotic Fuji 6 Hours earlier this month, in the 100th World Endurance Championship race since the modern series' formation in 2012.

Alpine's WEC win in Japan was its first since 2022

So was the first win for Alpine's A424 LMDh hypercar a fluke? Only partly. It certainly didn't look likely after Ferdinand Habsburg rear-ended Sébastien Buemi's Toyota in the early stages. That earned the #35 Alpine a five-second stop-go penalty – and another followed for a pit stop infringement. At the end of the first hour, the car was down in 15th. But a string of interruptions – safety cars, virtual safety cars, full-course yellow flags – created opportunities, and as always in such scenarios there were winners and losers.

Luck on pit stop timing raised Les Bleus into contention, but then a moment of strategic inspiration and some cool-headed driving delivered the win. A decision to take on only two new Michelin tyres at the final stop allowed the #35 Alpine to jump the #93 Peugeot and the #6 Porsche, and then Charles Milesi (who shared with Habsburg and Paul-Loup Chatin) had to stay there. Milesi is considered among the best of the new hypercar generation, and how he handled the big moment only enhanced that reputation.

Second place is a personal best for Peugeot's 9X8 LMH hypercar, which is finally coming good in the WEC. Although a post-race penalty for passing the safety car demoted the sister car and elevated Aston Martin's #009 entry to fifth – similarly a best result for the Valkyrie in its maiden season. It was always going to be a tough road for the V12-powered LMH hypercar against fully matured opposition, but it is now genuinely competitive.

The Ferraris have suffered a marked drop in form since the 499P's third consecutive Le Mans win in June (did someone say Balance of Performance?). But the Scuderia still tops the manufacturer standings, and Alessandro Pier Guidi, Antonio Giovinazzi and James Calado – who failed to score in Japan – remain at the head of the drivers' table.

It will all be decided in the WEC's finale, the Bahrain 8 Hours at Sakhir, on 8 November.

GETTY IMAGES

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME

I'm in the process of reading through and then disposing of the 450 car magazines I've collected since 1984. About half are Autocars. Some mags are older than my marriage (31 years) and, as my long-suffering wife can attest, they and cars in general have been a bit of a parallel relationship! Why mags, then and now? There was no internet then and today it's maybe a bit like owning vinyl records. I always kept the mags with a review of a car I 'might buy when I can afford it'. A tiny few I did buy, but most were pipe dreams.

I still can't manage to part with a few magazines and articles, including a Peter Wheeler interview from 1992, Autocar's 100th anniversary edition of 1995, a 1994 Subaru SVX buying guide, a 2009 tour around Bristol's servicing facility and the 1998 first road test of the Mk1 Audi TT.

It has been fascinating to reread through motoring history as it happened, about concepts that became reality and cars that never arrived. So many stories. The long career and varied hairstyles of Gerry McGovern. The rise of SUVs from farm implements via the Nissan Qashqai concept of 2004 to the latest Land Rover Defender Octa. A very, very young Jeremy Clarkson. It's also interesting to see the adverts: Aids warnings in the 1980s, brick mobile phones and basic websites in the 1990s, long-lost Rover optimism and the many small ads for private sellers that used to fill the back of each edition.

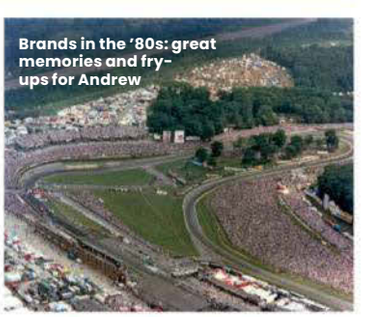
Perhaps the most prescient Autocar phrase I reread was from October 2011: "How a small American company is breaking new ground in the electric vehicle market with its revolutionary luxury saloon, due to go on sale in 2012." This came from a Tesla Model S article, with the first photo I'd seen of that guy Elon Musk.

Finally, one of the greatest joys is seeing how little (beard growth aside) Steve Cropley has changed in the photo atop his ever-present column (the first thing I read). This is either very good news for Steve or very bad!

Paul Medlam, Longton, Lancashire

Subscribers can now read every issue of Autocar from 1895 to the present day in digital form. See p42 for details – KC

JDM grey imports can be tempting but can also cause headaches



Brands in the '80s: great memories and fry-ups for Andrew

RECALL FIASCO

I import Nissan Serenas from Japan and convert them into camper vans. I have an agent in Japan who carries out my business there on my behalf and is extremely efficient at his job.

There is a safety recall in Japan on the 'HFC26' Serena S-Hybrid for failing alternator starter-generators. I have many of these vehicles here and en route subject to this recall.

My agent contacted Nissan Japan; they said they would honour the recall and I should contact Nissan GB. After a few false starts, due to Nissan GB telling me my local dealer was one in England, when I'm in Northern Ireland, then telling me my actual local dealer wasn't on their system, I eventually got assigned a customer service agent.

Three months later, I'm on my fourth agent. Each has been as equally useless as the last. It seems their only job is to make me feel part of the Nissan family and very much appreciated while having no actual powers to get my situation resolved.

My local dealer has zero customer skills. They have never let me know if any progress has been made (it hasn't). I got an email to say an appointment had been made to have my vehicles assessed, but when I attended the dealer refused to look at it, saying that they knew nothing about my appointment.

Due to the ridiculous delay in getting this sorted, I've had to repair two vehicles at my own expense, at a cost of almost £1000 each time.

My customer service agent tells me Nissan GB won't cover this cost and won't make a goodwill gesture. I can order a new alternator starter-generator, have it delivered to me and have it fitted in 48 hours, yet here I am three months later waiting for Nissan to do the same.

Dear Nissan, I know that you're in a bit of a predicament at the minute, but if this is how you treat your customers, I can understand why.

Andrew Smyth
Northern Ireland

Nissan GB said: "As a gesture of goodwill, we will support Mr Smyth with the recall work on the 12 vehicles already in the UK in terms of parts and labour. If he wishes to import further Nissan vehicles, we recommend he liaises with his agent in Japan to ensure all outstanding recall work is completed before export. If he already has further vehicles in transit, section 12 of the DVSA's Safety Defects and Recalls Code of Practice would apply, meaning responsibility for the repair would fall to him as the importer."

ANGUS BEEF

Colin Sutcliffe's letter about his wife's experience of trying to buy a Range Rover Evoque (10 September) struck a chord with me.

I've worked in the motor trade for nearly 40 years and since about 2004 have privately purchased 14 new Land Rovers. I decided to buy a new Range Rover Sport a few months ago and found an unregistered P530 at a dealership. I called to say I wanted to buy it but the deal needed to be done within a few days, as it was my company's financial year end. All the wheels were put in motion and the deal was all but finalised, but the next day I received a call to say they wouldn't sell me the car, due to the fact that I worked in the motor trade and they were concerned I would sell the car on.

I could have done that, granted, but I imagine I would have lost thousands in depreciation. I told them I was more than happy to sign a contract saying I wouldn't sell the car on and that the car was for me personally, just like the many previous Range Rovers I'd owned over the years and kept for two to four years. But no dice.

I couldn't believe my occupation prevented me from buying a £120k car, but it was their loss. I decided to keep my perfectly good current Range Rover and with the money they would have got bought a 4000-mile Porsche 911 instead.

The management need to give their heads a wobble with these anti-sales techniques, which are baffling. And it's a terrible way to treat a very loyal customer with a long history of buying their products.

Angus Mackillop
Scotland

GETTY IMAGES

Peter's Civic is one seat lever away from perfection

CIVIC BEAUTY

I was pleased to see the facelifted Honda Civic receive a generally favourable review (17 September). I'm surprised it hasn't been more popular; it's a rare sight in the UK.

I bought a new Civic earlier this year and think it's a great car. I didn't want an SUV and fancied something different from the Volkswagen Golf, Toyota Corolla etc. It may not be an enthusiast's car, but its low-slung design makes it feel quite sporty. I love the EV driving experience with the reassurance of a petrol engine to charge the battery, giving me that 'range-extender' effect.

The only disappointment is that there's no height adjustment for the front passenger's seat, which renders it uncomfortable for my wife – in my view, an unfortunate piece of cost-cutting.

Peter McDonald
Via email

MORNING GLORY

Matt Saunders is so right in his view of the appeal of race track cafeterias and particularly the Kentagon at Brands Hatch (Testing, Testing, 17 September).

I spent most of the 1980s as a freelance photographer at Brands at the start of my career, and a Kentagon breakfast was the essential start to each meeting.

I particularly remember sitting with marshals at the Formula Ford Festival on a Sunday morning in October 1986, hours after we had all watched on TV Nigel Mansell being robbed of the Formula 1 world championship by a blown tyre in Adelaide.

Through 1987, I got to know a family who lived quite close to me by showing off my pictures each race-day morning – father, mother and daughter, who was then going through the Brands racing school. Rosemary didn't end up going racing, but she did become my wife!

Andrew Charman
Llanfair Caereinion, Powys

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 15 OCTOBER

FEATURE

WHY WE BOND WITH CARS

Richard Webber fell for a Lancia Delta Integrale 24 years ago. Now he is selling it. A psychologist helps him understand how to break the tie

ROAD TEST

VOLVO XC60

We reveal just where this upmarket SUV ranks after its latest updates

INTERVIEW

THE MAN SHAPING VOLKSWAGEN'S FUTURE

VW R&D chief Kai Grunitz talks about developing small cars, taking on the Chinese and why drivers will "love" the firm's first electric GTI

EVERY WEEK

LIVING WITH A...

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Dacia Spring rival from China joins our fleet with plenty to prove

USED GUIDE

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It's more than £200k new. But now you can get a used one for £130k

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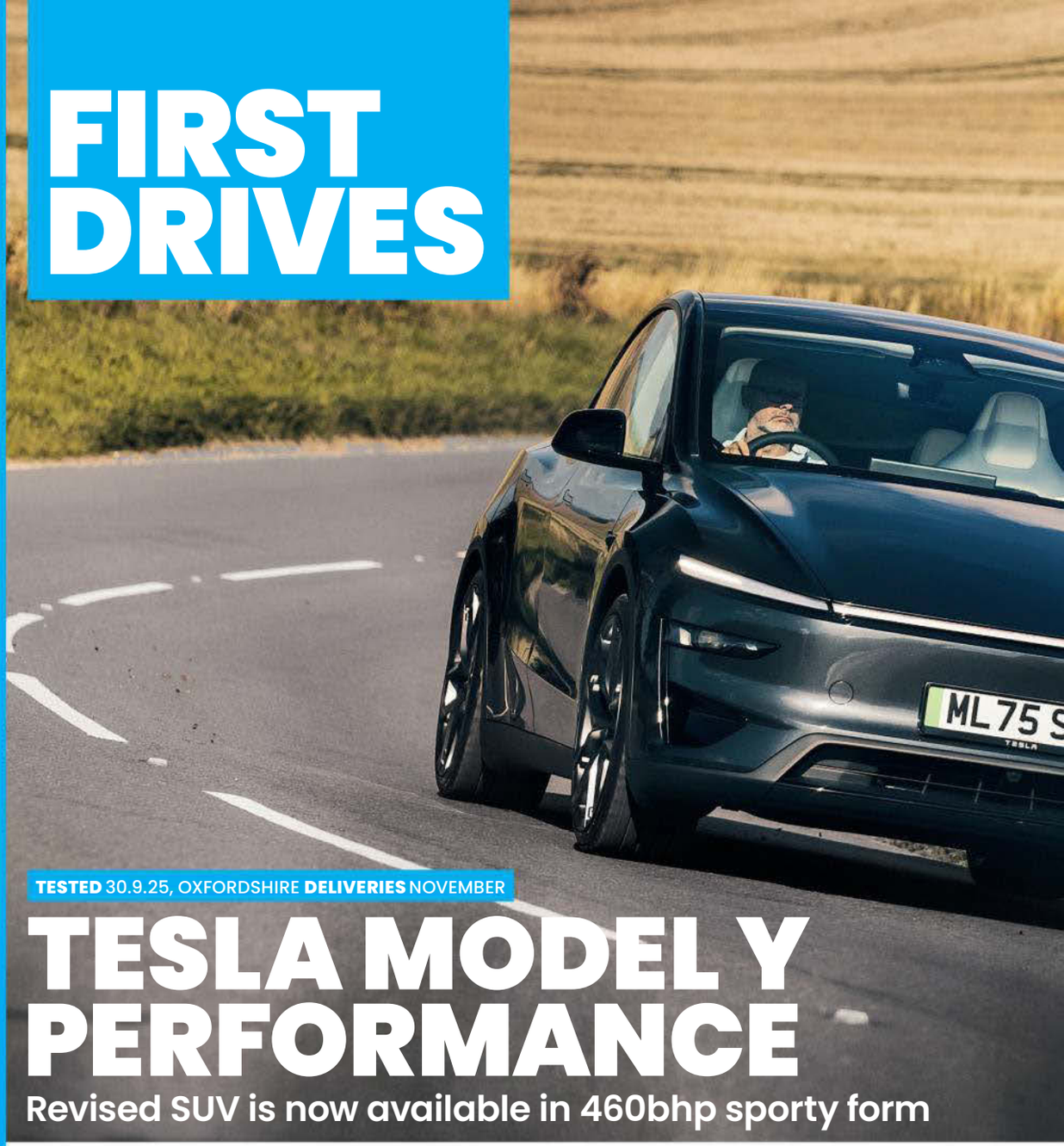
FIRST DRIVES



THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTED 30.9.25, OXFORDSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOVEMBER

TESLA MODEL Y PERFORMANCE

Revised SUV is now available in 460bhp sporty form

The revamp given to the regular Tesla Model Y earlier this year has now been extended to the sporty Performance variant, which expands the line-up to four: Rear-Wheel Drive, Long Range Rear-Wheel Drive, Long Range All-Wheel Drive and Performance All-Wheel Drive.

Externally, you will spot the same light bar treatment as given to the lesser models, but here that's joined by a (real) carbonfibre boot spoiler, plus a longer front splitter and a remodelled rear diffuser – which combine to reduce lift by 64% and drag by 10%. There are new 21in wheels, too, and red brake calipers.

The Performance wears rather serious 255/35 front and 275/35 rear Pirelli P Zero tyres.

It gets 460bhp from the same pair of 'Performance 4DU' motors as fitted to the Model 3 Performance saloon, which also donates its adaptive suspension, although here it's tuned differently to suit the Model Y's dimensions. At 4.8m long, 1.98m wide across the body (2.13m across the mirrors) and 1.61m high, it's one of the bigger cars in its class.

The Performance officially weighs 2033kg (the Long Range RWD we recently road tested was comfortingly close to its claimed kerb weight), which is weighty for, well, a car, but it's not that heavy for a full-size electric SUV that carries a battery estimated to be 82kWh and which can go from 0-60mph in 3.3sec. The top speed is 155mph.

The three powertrain modes give genuinely different performance levels. The most glacial accelerative option really softens the throttle response, and if you want to eke out the most range from your car while still keeping up with other traffic, this is the one for you. Standard mode is brisker again, while Insane mode offers scintillating throttle response and pushes the Model Y down the road at an unseemly pace.

'Arachnid 2.0' wheels are 21in, up from 19in on standard models

TESTER'S NOTE

Teslas are extremely well packaged. There's so much oddment stowage in a Model Y, along with two phone charging pads and cupholders. **MP**

Black faux leather is standard, white seen here an £1100 option

Accurate, nicely weighted steering helps on country roads

The WLTP range is 360 miles and the WLTP efficiency 3.8mpkWh, owing to the arrival of the battery from the Model 3 Performance, which is a bit more energy-dense, making the WLTP range about the same as in the Long Range AWD.

The Performance is priced from £61,990, with the Stealth Grey paint seen here the no-cost option colour.

Inside, the recent changes to the regular models have been adopted too, including a new touchscreen for the spacious rear. But exclusive to the Performance are new, more heavily bolstered front seats and big, shiny pedals. There's some gloss black in places, carbonfibre door inserts, puddle lights plus some Performance badges that look like the warp-speed effect thing.

It's a broadly comfortable cabin, with oodles of oddments stowage and the kind of easy, airy, broad visibility that we've come to expect from Teslas.

The simple cockpit design comes at the expense of physical dials and buttons, of course. There's an indicator stalk, a door knob and individual window switches, plus two rotary dials, a few haptic buttons on the steering wheel and a hazard warning light button, but everything else is dealt with by a 16in touchscreen (bigger than the 15.4in one in the pre-facelift car).

Among screen-heavy cars, Teslas remain probably the most intuitive: you always get climate settings on-screen and they're swipingly adjustable. But it would be better if everything weren't on it.

Still, among the on-screen buttons are those for the interesting bits: those that make changes to the driving dynamics. You can adjust the steering weight, accelerative response and level of regenerative braking, which isn't unusual, but thanks to the fitment of adaptive dampers (there are new bushes, some strengthening at the rear and steering knuckle amendments too) you can also pick between Normal and Sport damping levels.

The differences between them are pretty subtle but pleasingly well judged: it's not like one is super-soft and the other super-hard. If it were a simple one-button push that you could find easily on the move, I could imagine owners swapping between the modes more than I suspect they will, given it's on a menu a couple of clicks away.

In its Standard suspension mode, the Performance is already relatively firm and controlled, but it will also round off the worst lumps and bumps of pockmarked towns. On a more testing country road, it feels its girth more, with some pitch and yaw that's easy enough to live with if you're not asking a lot of the car, but this is a Performance variant with faintly ludicrous initial acceleration response.

And if you want to use some (or all) of that, here's where the firmer suspension mode comes in, reducing those unwanted movements. There's still some roll and lean in corners, but it's better controlled – although with it comes inevitably some brittleness, entirely bearable on the open road but occasionally too much in town.

Is it fun? This is a two-tonne SUV, so these things are relative. And it's not like a regular Model Y is slow. But with the extra control and the good visibility generally offered by Teslas, especially tall ones, if you were really late for something the other end of a twisting road, I doubt you would get there much faster in anything else.

MATT PRIOR

TECH SPEC

TESLA MODEL Y PERFORMANCE

Spectacular pace in an impressive all-round electric SUV package. Still one of the best out there

Price £61,990
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 460bhp
Torque 547lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2033kg
0-62mph 3.5sec
Top speed 155mph
Battery 82/79kWh (total/est usable)
Range, economy 360 miles, 3.8mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Kia EV6 GT, Porsche Macan Electric

TESTED 23.9.25, NORTH JUTLAND, DENMARK **DELIVERIES** LATE 2025

JEEP COMPASS FULL ELECTRIC

Is this new SUV more than just a Peugeot 3008 wearing a suit of armour?

Brand values can be cruel. If you're going to try to honour them, you had better do it faultlessly, lest the enthusiasts pour scorn over your latest product. A Mercedes that isn't built like a nuclear bunker? Blasphemy! A Ferrari that isn't the sharpest drive in its class? Humbug!

Yet abandoning them entirely while still selling the idea can work out remarkably well. BMW clearly has few regrets about making the 1 Series front-wheel drive and making a neatly styled miniature electric crossover with a single driven axle won Jeep a Car of the Year trophy for the Avenger. Its European sales skyrocketed.

The all-American off-road brand is ready to repeat the trick with the third generation of the Compass. Whereas the previous one was loosely based on a platform that traces its roots to the Fiat Grande Punto, the new one is a product of the 2020s Stellantis machine.

Take one not-so-American do-it-all platform (STLA Medium, in this case, as previously seen under the new-shape Peugeot 3008, Vauxhall Grandland and Citroën C5 Aircross), add some butch styling complete with a seven-slot grille and plenty of Willys Jeep-themed 'Easter eggs' and, hey presto, 2026 Car of the Year. Or at least that's the theory.

Use of that platform means the Compass is being launched with two powertrains: an electric one with a 73.7kWh battery and a single 211bhp motor at the front and a hybrid (see opposite page).

A dual-motor version with an additional 177bhp motor on the rear axle will follow, and it stands to reason that a long-range version with 97kWh and 227bhp will too.

It's surprising that Jeep isn't launching the new Compass with the dual-motor powertrain to at least present some semblance of off-roadability. No matter: we all know how likely it is that a Jeep sees off-road action.

Of course, Jeep's engineers will tell you that plenty of calibration work goes on behind the big-ticket hardware, but Stellantis stuff has a habit of feeling quite samey.

Where there are clear upgrades to the Compass over the 3008, for instance, is inside.

The dashboard layout is neat and modern enough, if a little forgettable. The roll shutter at the front hides a big storage bin, there's an underground garage-type tray for the inductive phone charger and even more space on the lower level of the centre console. The passenger also gets an extra tray.

As we noted last week with the C5 Aircross, for these bigger cars there seems to be more variation in switchgear than in the smaller ones. The steering wheel buttons are unique to the Compass, as is the drive mode selector. It also swaps the universal drive selector toggle for a rotary one.

I tried both the basic manual seats and the fancier electric ones and weirdly found the standard ones more comfortable, since they don't have the hard massage elements in them. Unlike in the 3008, the angle of the seat base supports your thighs quite well.

The touchscreen infotainment system is supported by a selection of buttons and, unlike in some other Stellantis cars, it actually responds fairly quickly. Because it's so wide, you can put plenty of functions on the home screen.

Rear leg room is similar to what you find in the Skoda Elroq, albeit with a high floor and a curiously short base and upright backrest.

At 550 litres, boot space is closer to that of the Enyaq (585 litres).

EV's acceleration won't get the blood pumping; a dual-motor version will follow

TESTER'S NOTE

The seats are upholstered in something called scuba vinyl, which feels like a sort of wetsuit material. My test car also had rubber floor mats. But I don't think I'd want to get water on those screens. **IV**

Both ride quality and handling are just about okay

You wouldn't choose the Compass for how it drives, though. It has next to no distinguishing features in that respect. Its 0-62mph time is an unremarkable 8.5sec, because 211bhp stops being a lot when faced with 2.2 tonnes of weight.

It has steering wheel paddles as well as a button to toggle one-pedal driving, so no complaints there.

With entirely feel-free steering and modest grip from its Michelin e-Primacy tyres, you're disinclined to chuck it into a corner with any enthusiasm, and the suspension is neither here nor there: slightly too firm to be truly comfortable but also slightly underdamped over some big bumps.

I saw efficiency of 3.0-3.6mpkWh, which means the 74kWh battery should be good for 230-260 miles.

Currently, the only Compass EV on sale is the First Edition, which is decently well equipped but still leaves the sunroof, premium sound system and upgraded active cruise control to option packs.

It costs from £39,200, which puts it about level with the Elroq, even though it's a bigger car.

That seems like a healthy positioning, because for all the 'brand' talk about adventure and capability in the press pack, the Compass feels like a competent but unremarkable option.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

JEEP COMPASS FULL ELECTRIC FIRST EDITION

Entirely commendable and well priced but utterly forgettable

Price £39,200
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 211bhp
Torque 253lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 2185kg
0-62mph 8.5sec
Top speed 112mph
Battery 79.9/73.7kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 311 miles, 3.6mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Renault Scenic, Skoda Enyaq

TESTED 23.9.25, NORTH JUTLAND, DENMARK **DELIVERIES** LATE 2025

JEEP COMPASS E-HYBRID

ICE version is cheaper, less powerful

FOR BUYERS WHO can't make an electric car work, Jeep also offers a hybrid powertrain in the new Compass. It's the familiar 1.2-litre turbo petrol triple with a six-speed dual-clutch gearbox that hides a small electric motor. As well as not needing to be plugged in, this version in £3480 cheaper.

From the outside, the two Compasses look all but identical. The typical Jeep seven-slot grille is just as vestigial here, but there is a small real grille underneath. At the back, you have to duck down and look under the bumper to see the exhaust. The keen observer will then spot another difference: while the EV has a multi-link rear axle, the e-Hybrid makes do with a torsion beam.

The two may be hard to tell apart from the outside, but there's no doubt that the EV provides the nicer driving experience. While 141bhp for 1667kg doesn't make for a horrendous power-to-weight ratio in the e-Hybrid, 10.3sec to 62mph is pretty slow by modern standards. More than the outright performance, it's the roughness of the engine and gearbox at low speed that grate, as well as the lazy responses out of town.

With just 0.9kWh of battery and 28bhp of motor power, this powertrain's capacity for electric running is very limited in a heavy car. Let the engine rev out and it makes quite an appealing three-cylinder thrum, but it's unlikely that people will drive it that way.

It might be the torsion beam, or it might be how it's generally set up, but the e-Hybrid's suspension doesn't feel as refined either. It's generally a bit firmer and feels thumpier around town.

At first glance, the e-Hybrid is quite well priced: at £35,720, it undercuts hybrid versions of the Kia Sportage and Renault Austral. But given that the hybrid system isn't contributing all that much, one might look to conventional petrol or mild-hybrid competitors – at which point automatic versions of the Sportage and Skoda Karoq would be much more recommendable.

ILLYA VERPRAET

There's even less excitement on offer here – and less comfort too

TECH SPEC

JEEP COMPASS E-HYBRID FIRST EDITION

Reasonable value but doesn't do enough to stop itself being outclassed by older rivals

Price £35,720
Engine 3 cyls in line, 1199cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor and ISG
Power 141bhp at 5500rpm
Torque 170lb ft at 1750rpm
Gearbox 6-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD
Kerb weight 1667kg
0-62mph 10.3sec
Top speed 117mph
Economy 50.4mpg
CO_2, tax band 126g/km, 31%
Rivals Kia Sportage, Volvo XC40

TESTER'S NOTE

Ford has used Sony audio, but I can't remember any other time I've seen 'SONY' imprinted on a car's loudspeaker. **MP**

TESTED 24.9.25, EAST SUSSEX **DELIVERIES** NOW

JAECOO 5

After Chinese firm's Hyundai Tucson comes its take on the Hyundai Kona

The rollout of Jaecoo (sibling to Omoda, both export-only brands of Chinese conglomerate Chery) continues with the 5 (and electric E5 – see opposite page), a relatively small crossover of the sort you find quite a lot these days.

The 5 sits on the same platform as the larger Jaecoo 7, already on sale, as well as Omoda and Chery models various. Jaecoo is supposed to be the active, outdoorsy brand; Omoda is meant to be a bit more sleek and urban; while Chery is the own-brand brown bread of the trio. There are other brands elsewhere.

The 5, then, is a 4.38m-long five-seater, which puts it at a similar length to the Range Rover Evoque or Hyundai Kona, a wee bit shorter than the Nissan Qashqai or Audi Q5.

At the moment, buyers have two powertrain options: an electric one and a 1.6-litre turbo petrol engine driving the front wheels via a seven-speed dual-clutch 'box developed with Getrag but built by Chery.

It makes 145bhp and 203lb ft of torque and, unlike with the larger 7, there's no four-wheel-drive option. It's said to be able to accelerate from 0-62mph in 10.2sec and emit 159g/km of CO_2, so you're not going to be having it as a company car.

Retail is where it's at, priced from £24,505 in Pure specification and £28,000 on the nose in Luxury trim. B/C-segment space and kit for B-segment money is how they're pitching it.

It's pretty well equipped in its base form, with the upper spec adding a huge glass roof, Sony audio, powered, ventilated and heated seats and a powered bootlid.

Ride comfort and cornering composure will satisfy those who place little value on them

Other than paint colour (white free, anything else £500, two-tone £1000), there aren't any options. This is a straightforward offering, and there are more than 80 dealers already offering it.

What's it like? I mean, fine, really. The interior look and feel is good at the money, the rear is spacious and there's a 480-litre boot. There are actual switches for the door mirrors and rear windows and lights, and while most other controls are relegated to the big touchscreen, I've used worse – and it includes unusual features like setting the maximum tailgate opening height, which, if you frequently park near an overhanging object, is quite a neat touch.

Dynamically, if you don't ask much of it, it's also all right, but this is where things start to unravel.

For one, the steering wheel has its blocky spokes right at quarter to three, so you either have to hold it above those or accept that your fingers won't grip the rim.

"Dynamically, if you don't ask much of it, it's all right, but this is where things start to unravel"

Bursting with tech, good materials, just a shame about the wheel shape

Then there's the step-off, which goes from giving very little acceleration to too scrabbly in a heartbeat.

It sounds a bit thrashy when worked and not so when not.

The ride is mostly pliant. The body initially rolls briskly but then settles, but having done so, it has trouble putting down even its modest power, and it's all too easy to trouble the traction without trying that hard. Basically, it's better the less you ask of it.

I haven't driven a Jaecoo 7, so couldn't tell you if the ADAS kit that we found irritating then is better or worse here. Obviously it has to have it and it has to default to on, so you have to do a 30-second pre-flight check to turn it all off, but for testing purposes I gave it the opportunity to make needless bongs and tug at the wheel, and it didn't waste its chance. Still, it's less infuriating than some cars I've tried, so maybe these systems are improving.

So there you have it: an affordable crossover/SUV thing with an amiable appearance inside and out, plenty of kit, a rapidly increasing number of dealers and a price that many people will not overlook. There's a lack of dynamic finesse to it, so it isn't for us, but I suspect that won't bother prospective buyers one bit.

MATT PRIOR

TECH SPEC

JAECOO 5 LUXURY

Great value for money so long as you don't value driving pleasure

Price £28,000
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1598cc, turbo, petrol
Power 145bhp at 5000rpm
Torque 203lb ft at 1750-2750rpm
Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD
Kerb weight 1535kg
0-62mph 10.2sec
Top speed 113mph
Economy 41.0mpg
CO_2, tax band 159g/km, 37%
Rivals Nissan Qashqai, Skoda Karoq

TESTED 24.9.25, EAST SUSSEX **DELIVERIES** NOW

JAECOO E5

Small SUV can also be had as an EV

THE ELECTRIC JAECOO E5 shares, as you might imagine, most of its design and interior and platform with the combustion 5, save for the engine and transmission bit plus a few design touches (like the grille).

Instead it gets a 61.1kWh lithium-iron-phosphate battery pack and a 201bhp permanent magnet synchronous motor, said to be good for a 7.7sec 0-62mph sprint and a WLTP combined range of 248 miles.

It can be charged only at up to 80kW, but there's also a three-phase-capable 11kW on-board AC charger, plus it can handle single-phase electricity too, of course.

Trim levels and equipment largely mirror those of the ICE 5, with the exception that Luxury trim here comes with a Pet Mode, which lets you set the climate control so you can leave an animal in the car and the touchscreen displays 'Pet Mode' in big letters so nobody breaks your windows.

There's also a Camping Mode, which lets you play audio through a loud under-bonnet speaker and even do karaoke, encouraging fellow campers to want to break your windows.

It's priced at £27,505 in Pure form or £30,505 as the Luxury and, being zero-emission, it has a bearable benefit-in-kind tax rating.

There are three drive modes, but in kind with the ICE 5 it's passively damped and sprung and so on, so the biggest difference between Eco, Normal and Sport is the amount of regenerative braking you get by default. Eco has the least and was to my feet the most pleasant of them all.

Dynamically, what goes for the ICE 5 applies quite a lot here too. Throttle response is, perhaps obviously, smoother and better, because there are no gears to jolt or turbos to spin, so it's smooth when pulling away. But you don't have to be driving like a tearaway to induce unseemly scrabble or body looseness. It's a slightly indecorous, unfinessed driving experience.

Roster of kit is generous before you get to our car's Luxury trim

If you're just choosing on the numbers, maybe that doesn't matter. It's big inside and has decent kit for a small price on the windscreen and in a lot of ways is perfectly agreeable. Not in the ways to please an enthusiast, but which compact crossover does?

MATT PRIOR

TECH SPEC

JAECOO E5 LUXURY

Priced at a lower number than the size it presents. Comes with lots of kit and feels fine inside but its dynamics lack polish

Price £30,505
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 201bhp
Torque 212lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1690kg
0-62mph 7.7sec
Top speed 108mph
Battery 61.1/61.0kWh (total/est usable)
Range, economy 248 miles, 3.7mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Hyundai Kona Electric, Kia EV3, MG S5 EV

TESTED 30.9.25, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA **DELIVERIES** DECEMBER

KIA PV5 PASSENGER

Bullish brand bursts onto van market with futuristic-looking electric MPV

Even by the standards of a car maker that has radically transformed its product portfolio in recent years, the new PV5 is a hugely significant machine. Which is saying something for what is essentially a van.

Actually, Kia would rather you call it a Platform Beyond Vehicle (PBV), a descriptor that will be applied to the Korean firm's new line of electric light commercial vehicles (eLCVs). The PV5 is the first, and it will be joined by the larger PV7 and PV9 in 2027 and 2029 respectively – and there are more to come too.

Kia is plotting what it terms a "brazen journey" to become a leader in the eLCV segment: it's targeting 250,000 PBV sales globally by 2030. And given Kia's record of growth in recent years, don't bet against that happening.

For now, let's focus on the PV5. It sits on the new E-GMP.S platform, a CV-focused variant of the bespoke electric car architecture that underpins Kia's EV and Hyundai's Ioniq ranges, and from launch will be offered in Cargo and, as tested here, Passenger forms. More variants will follow.

At 4695mm long, the PV5 Passenger is slightly shorter than the standard Volkswagen ID Buzz or the Citroën ë-Spacetourer and its various siblings. As the only other bespoke electric van-based MPV on the market, the ID Buzz is the obvious rival, but while that trades on retro design charm, the PV5 opts for cutting-edge futurism, particularly its distinctive vertical LED headlights.

The Passenger version will at first offer two nickel-manganese-cobalt battery options with two power outputs, both utilising a single front-mounted electric motor.

The Standard Range model has a 51.5kWh capacity, 120bhp, 184lb ft of torque and a 183-mile range.

The Long Range model can go 256 miles, thanks to a 71.2kWh battery, with power boosted to 160bhp (but torque is unchanged). That range is competitive for an eLCV, but private buyers might expect more.

Both batteries can be charged at speeds of up to 150kW. The charging

PV5 is the first of Kia's PBV range and will initially also come in Cargo form

"You can tell the underpinnings are derived from a car platform rather than one made for vans"

port is located in the middle of the bonnet – a placement designed to ensure unimpeded access to all of the doors when it's plugged in but which you might curse when reversing out of tight charging bays.

Two trims are offered: Essential and Plus, with the latter adding styling elements such as alloy wheels, niceties including heated seats and useful features such as a vehicle-to-load outlet and more safety kit. An efficiency-boosting heat pump is only offered on Plus models as a £780 extra.

The PV5 Passenger will initially be offered with five seats; six- and seven-seaters and a wheelchair-accessible variant will follow next year. Access to the rear is via sliding doors, and Kia makes much of the low 399mm step-in height.

Given that it's shorter than Kia's EV9 SUV, the PV5 Passenger has a Tardis-like interior: there's a ridiculous amount of leg room in both rows, and even with the seats up, the boot is 1311mm long and has a capacity of 1330 litres.

The dashboard is reminiscent of Kia's cars, with a 7.0in digital instrument display and a 12.9in infotainment touchscreen, which uses bespoke Android Automotive-based software that's simple to use.

There are fewer physical controls than we would like: the heating controls are on the touchscreen and the row of hard buttons are largely for opening the various doors.

Don't expect lashings of premium splendour: the PV5's working roots show in the hard-wearing materials. Although in fairness these should prove practical.

It's all very well designed, with more neat storage solutions than you would find in an Ikea showroom, such as storage areas underneath the cabin floor.

The driving position is high and upright, as you would expect from a van, and despite its considerable bulk, visibility is mostly good, thanks to large windows and huge wing mirrors.

Expectations of driving dynamics should be tempered, but the PV5 Passenger is a very agreeable thing. The electric motor's delivery is very smooth, and while it's not flush with power, even with the higher output, the motor copes well with the 2070kg kerb weight.

It's also really refined on 16in wheels, barely making any sound, which makes for a hushed and relaxed ride, even if the cabin isolation has limits.

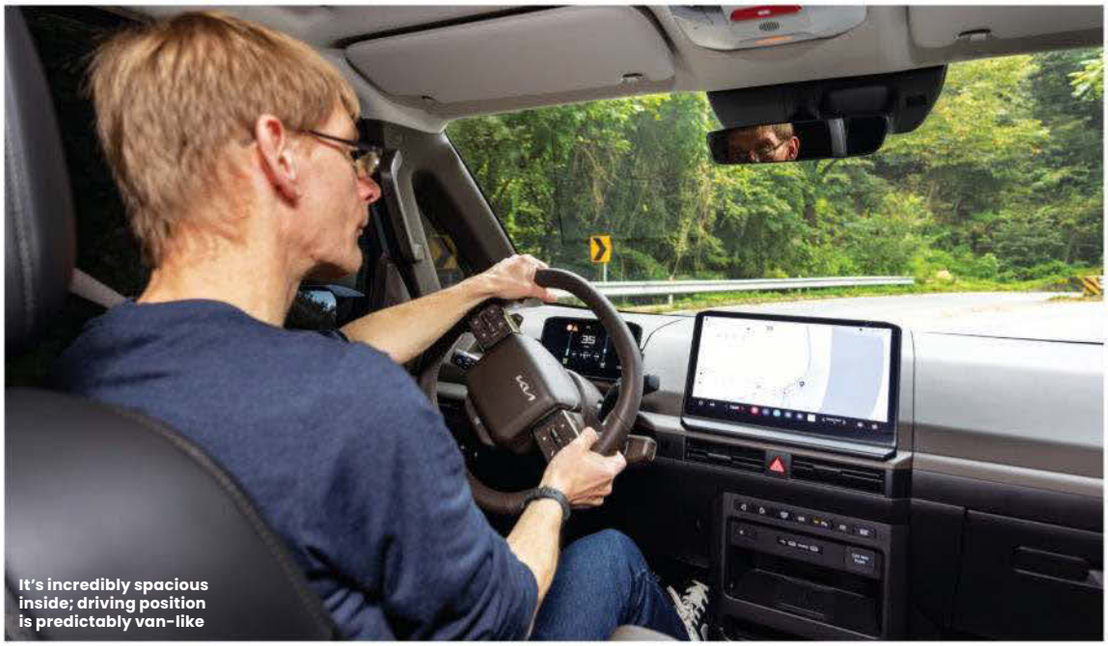
You can tell the underpinnings are derived from a car platform rather than one made for CVs: there's a maturity and poise to its handling. The minimal overhangs make it easy to place and the steering is light, if unengaging. If you really try to hustle it through bends, the PV5's bulk does reveal itself and it can be a bit crashy and jostling over bumps, but it rides better than many van-based MPVs.

It was also efficient: on my mixed test route in South Korea, it averaged around 4.0mpkWh – impressive for a slab-sided, boxy MPV.

But the head-turner is the price: the Standard Range starts from £32,995, the Long Range £35,995. That's essentially a £10,000 saving on the similar ID Buzz – and makes this colossal load-lugger cheaper than many small EVs. Pound for pound, you will struggle to get more EV for your money.

You will find many EVs that go farther, though, and the 256-mile range is likely to deter many buyers. But if you can live with it and you're looking for a massive, practical EV, the PV5 Passenger is a compelling proposition – and an immensely likeable one.

JAMES ATTWOOD



It's incredibly spacious inside; driving position is predictably van-like

Driving experience can be compared to the VW ID Buzz's – a compliment

TESTER'S NOTE

Given the PV5's potential popularity with taxi drivers, the front and rear bumpers are each divided into three segments so they can be replaced more cheaply. **JA**

TECH SPEC

KIA PV5 PASSENGER LONG RANGE PLUS

Charming, hugely spacious and keenly priced. Should reward those still prepared to pick a big MPV

Price £38,295
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 160bhp
Torque 184lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 2070kg
0-62mph 10.6sec
Top speed na
Battery 71.2kWh
Range, economy 256 miles, 3.6mpkWh (est)
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Vauxhall Vivaro Life EV, VW ID Buzz

UK VERDICTS

TESTED 30.9.25, BERKSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

KIA SPORTAGE

Hit SUV gets even bolder look, powertrain upgrades and revised interior

One thousand one hundred and seventy seven Pumas: it's either a terrifyingly large pack of mountain lions or what stopped the Kia Sportage from being the best-selling new car in the UK in 2024. This is a wildly popular model in a wildly popular class. No wonder that Jaecoo, Jeep and just about everyone short of Jaguar wants in. People go mad for it.

It must be outstanding, then. Well, our three-and-a-half-star road test verdict on the hybrid in 2022 concluded it "catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive", so there's clearly room for improvement, which this facelift promises to partly deliver.

The updated Mk5 Sportage still catches the eye, with an even bigger front grille that takes after the latest Sorento. The upright headlights and wide, rectangular grille remind me a bit of the 1965 Buick Riviera Gran Sport. No? Just me? Naturally, there are also new wheel styles and there has been a subtle redesign of the rear bumper.

The mechanical changes look like they should address some of our complaints. No 6.9-litre V8 behind that grille, but the 1.6-litre hybrid powertrain, which we previously found a little noisy and clunky, has been upgraded with a new electric motor and different calibration.

The motor now has 64bhp instead of 60bhp, raising the system output from 226bhp to 235bhp (one plus one doesn't always equal two with hybrids). Weirdly, that makes it 0.2sec *slower* to 62mph than before, according to Kia.

More importantly, though, it does seem to be a bit smoother than before in practice and more willing to use all the motor's power before sending the petrol engine's revs soaring. You still hear the 1.6-litre four-cylinder grumble coarsely if you're being lead-footed, but it will lope along quietly most of the time.

Fuel economy remains a bit disappointing: don't expect more than 45mpg.

It's available with four-wheel drive as an option (a conventional 4x4 system with a propshaft, rather than an extra motor).

Design alterations are far more prominent at the front than the rear

"The hybrid is now smoother in practice and more willing to use all the motor's power"

Petrol Sportage is engaging and rides better than the hybrid

Screen and steering wheel are new but the star of the show is that manual 'box

TESTER'S NOTE

The pre-facelift Sportage had distinctively shaped interior air vents that were moulded into the rubber dash top. These have gone in favour of the bigger screen and more conventional outlets, but you can still see the bump in the dash where they were. **IV**

The plug-in hybrid version will also return later this year with a choice of front- or four-wheel drive.

The mild-hybrid petrol and the diesel have gone, but there is still an unelectrified option: the hybrid's 1.6-litre petrol engine by itself.

It's a typical modern four-cylinder turbo: slightly lethargic at really low revs but smooth and quiet. It does its best work in the mid-range, and while it will rev to 6500rpm or so, it growls in complaint over 3500rpm.

This engine comes coupled to either a delightfully snickety six-speed manual with pedals that are ideal for heel-and-toeing or a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic that does the job adequately rather than outstandingly. I saw 37mpg from the manual, a bit less from the auto.

Although there haven't been any headline changes to the chassis, I found the Sportage more agreeable than I remembered. Body control is slightly loose, if controlled enough to not be disconcerting or nausea-inducing. It has adequate grip and turns in reasonably well, with the steering weighting up just a little as you load up the car in a corner. It's also evenly sped, making it nicely intuitive.

Ride quality depends on which version you pick. Like all of its rivals, the Sportage suffers from a bit of pitch and head toss on very bumpy roads, despite its relatively soft suspension. On the standard 17in wheels, patchy surfaces are smothered well, but they thud through noticeably on the bigger wheels. Like-for-like, the petrol rides a bit better than the hybrid.

One of the big changes for the facelift is a revised dashboard. The Sportage has gained the 12.3in wide-aspect touchscreen that we've already seen in the Sorento, EV9, EV4 etc. As on those cars, it works quickly and logically and does wireless phone mirroring. It now also has YouTube (only when you're parked, of course) and the voice assistant is plugged into ChatGPT.

The gloss black centre console has gone in favour of a much less fingerprint-sensitive matt plastic. As before, it hosts a good selection of physical buttons, storage options and USB charging ports.

The round, three-spoke steering wheel has been replaced with a not-quite-round, two-spoke one.

The rest is much as it was. The driver's seat is comfortable, with a cushion angled well to support your thighs and decent lateral bolstering. While the Sportage doesn't have the most rear leg room and boot space, it's class-competitive for both.

So does the Sportage now "hold your interest to drive"? As one of just a few cars of its kind still available with a manual gearbox, and a nice one at that, the petrol version just might. But that's likely to take only a fraction of sales (5-15%, reckons Kia). The more popular hybrid probably still won't, but then frankly nor will any of its rivals. You will want something hatchback-shaped if that's your thing.

What the Sportage does do is drive pretty blamelessly, look fairly distinctive, and have a practical interior that is well laid out and contains tech that's easy to understand. It's also priced in line with the competition and, apart from slightly sub-par fuel economy, it's hard to seriously knock.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

KIA SPORTAGE 1.6 T-GDi PURE

Facelifted version of Kia's most popular car remains very complete

★★★★☆

Price £30,885
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1598cc, turbocharged, petrol
Power 147bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 184lb ft at 1500-4000rpm
Gearbox 6-spd manual, FWD
Kerb weight 1552kg
0-62mph 9.7sec
Top speed 119mph
Economy 39.8mpg
CO_2, tax band 162g/km, 37%
Rivals Ford Kuga, Mazda CX-5, Nissan Qashqai

TESTED 30.9.25, HAMPSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

GENESIS GV60

Korean premium brand facelifts its best-seller and brings bigger battery

You can't fault the ambition of Genesis. Arriving in Europe barely five years ago, the Hyundai Motor Group's luxury brand has ignored the received wisdom that pretenders to the established order should take it slowly when trying to get a slice of the premium pie. In that short space of time, it launched an entire product line-up, largely electrified, that made up for what it lacked in brand recognition with technical innovation, quality and kit.

Adding a certain style to that list of merits was the GV60, a distinctive crossover-coupé that was Genesis's first all-electric offering. It was based on the advanced 800V E-GMP architecture shared with Hyundai's Ioniq 5 and Kia's EV6, giving the GV60 the state-of-the-art EV cachet that could only be rivalled by the far more expensive Porsche Taycan.

However, the GV60 has been in showrooms for three years now, so it's about due this mid-life refresh. Overall sales numbers are still modest by the standards of rival premium brands (and bosses seem unruffled by that, citing quality not quantity as their goal), but the GV60 counts for around a third of Genesis's UK registrations, so this is an important facelift.

That said, you will need to be observant to spot the changes, which on the outside stretch to new bumpers, slimmer matrix LED headlights and the introduction of colour-coded wheel arches and side skirts in place of the old car's more rugged naked grey plastic treatment. There are also some new designs for the alloy wheels and a smattering of fresh paint finishes.

The low-key approach continues inside, where there's the same widescreen 27in OLED infotainment touchscreen and driver's display already seen on the updated GV70 SUV, plus a new steering wheel design and some new trim materials.

As before, the fit and finish is top-notch, while there's a pleasing balance between touchscreen and physical buttons for frequently used functions. Features such as the rotating, illuminated crystal ball gear selector are a little chintzy, but overall the GV60's roomy cabin has a cosseting and classy feel.

Mechanically, there's not much that has been altered, apart from the inclusion of a larger, 84kWh battery featuring enhanced battery temperature control that includes cooling as well as heating.

As a result, there's a slight uplift in WLTP range, with all variants now claiming more than 300 miles (the cheapest going the farthest, at 348 miles), although the 10-80% charge time (at 240kW) remains 18 minutes.

As before, there are three trim options (now renamed Pure, Sport and Performance), each with a slightly different powertrain.

The latter two get dual-motor four-wheel drive and, in the case

GV60 is highly refined but a harsh ride can undermine the sense of occasion

TESTER'S NOTE

There's a new auto mode for the regenerative braking that uses the inbuilt sat-nav and real-time traffic information to make best use of energy harvesting. It works surprisingly well. **JD**

"Highlights include accurate steering and surprisingly wieldy handling for a two-tonne car"

Big touchscreen but lots of switchgear, too; perceived quality is premium-grade

It's hard to tell pre- and post-facelift cars apart, especially from the rear

of the Performance (see opposite), an impressive 483bhp, while at the other end of the scale is the 225bhp rear-wheel-drive Pure, tested here.

Given that no other modifications have been made, the GV60 drives pretty much as before, which means this low-ranking model remains our pick of the bunch.

Highlights include the smooth and brisk power delivery that feels faster than its claimed 7.8sec 0-62mph dash time would have you believe, hushed rolling refinement, accurate and reasonably weighted steering and surprisingly wieldy handling for a machine that's a biscuit over two tonnes and a broad 1.9 metres across the hips.

A shout-out to the effective regenerative braking system too, which can be easily ramped up or down using the steering wheel-mounted paddles and offers true one-pedal driving.

On the debit side is a rather lumpen ride that struggles with sharper imperfections, causing occupants to be jostled around over broken and scarred surfaces. It can get caught out over big crests or into large compressions as well, the springs and passive dampers only just keeping all that mass in check.

The GV60 is still a likeable car, though, and one that continues to demonstrate Genesis's confidence in its ability to rapidly ascend the ranks of the premium elite.

JAMES DISDALE

TECH SPEC

GENESIS GV60 PURE

Small but worthwhile changes, particularly the range increase, make this a fine choice for those looking to avoid the usual suspects

★★★★☆

Price £54,115
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 225bhp
Torque 258lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
Kerb weight 2050kg
0-62mph 7.8sec
Top speed 115mph
Battery 84/80kWh (total/est usable)
Range, economy 348 miles, 4.3mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Audi Q4 E-tron Sportback, BMW iX1, Mercedes-Benz EQA

TESTED 30.9.25, THRUXTON **DELIVERIES** NOW

GENESIS GV60 PERFORMANCE

'Manual gearbox' for sporty version

WHILE UNDER-THE-SKIN upgrades have been kept to a minimum for lesser GV60s, the flagship Performance model has been handed a few extra features.

As before, it gets a dual-motor powertrain that delivers 434bhp, increasing to 483bhp for 10-second bursts when you push the steering wheel-mounted Boost button. Also carried over are the adaptive dampers, electronically controlled limited-slip rear differential and a dynamic torque-vectoring function.

The big change comes in the form of a virtual manual gearbox, recently introduced on the larger Electrified GV70 SUV, which uses essentially the same software first seen in the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N.

A few laps of Thruxton was enough to confirm that it works well, adding a surprising layer of driver interaction with snappy paddle-shift 'gearchanges' and the same clever mapping that allows the car to mimic ICE characteristics (laboured performance in a high gear at low revs, engine braking and so on). Only the artificial exhaust is underwhelming, lacking volume and sounding rather synthesised.

As for the rest of the car, it remains largely the same. It's ludicrously rapid in a straight line, even without bothering the Boost, while the motors' ability to spin to 19,000rpm allows the GV60 to keep pulling hard when some rivals are starting to flag.

As you would expect of a 2.2-tonne SUV, the GV60 Performance isn't quite as impressive in the corners. Try to carry a little too much speed into a bend and you're instantly aware of the mass working against you – as you are when standing on the brake pedal for slower corners.

Take a smoother and considered approach and it can cover ground at an alarming rate, although torque steer can be an issue out of slower corners (turn the stability control off and it's the front wheels that spin up first, which in the dry leaves a smoking vapour trail worthy of any Red Arrows display).

We will have to drive the new GV60 Performance on the road to deliver a definitive verdict, but on this showing the fast flagship doesn't make as compelling a case as its entry-level stablemate.

JAMES DISDALE

It can't replicate the handling heroics of its Ioniq 5 N sibling

TECH SPEC

GENESIS GV60 PERFORMANCE

Fake gearbox entertains much more than the dynamics

Price £67,715
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 483bhp (Boost mode)
Torque 516lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2220kg
0-62mph 4.0sec (Boost mode)
Top speed 146mph
Battery 84/80kWh (total/est usable)
Range, economy 311 miles, 3.8mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Porsche Macan 4 Electric, Polestar 4 Long Range AWD, Tesla Model Y Performance

ROAD TEST

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5778

NISSAN QASHQAI

Popular UK-built crossover gets a box-fresh hybrid system

MODEL TESTED
NISSAN QASHQAI E-POWER TEKNA+
Price £43,210
Power 203bhp
Torque 243lb ft
0-60mph 7.6sec
30-70mph 6.1sec
Top speed 110mph
Average economy 50.4mpg
Electric range na
CO_2 emissions 105g/km
70-0mph 46.0m (12deg C, drizzle)

The third-generation Nissan Qashqai has received a mid-life facelift in two separate instalments. The first part came along in the summer of 2024, when the car's exterior styling, cabin design and digital technology were refreshed. The second part, just released into production, was centred much more on the powertrain.

This test will concern itself with the content of both model-year overhauls, although it's the mechanical stuff that seems the most significant. That's because the Qashqai became Nissan's first global model to benefit from its new third-generation e-Power hybrid powertrain.

The headline sell on the e-Power drive concept is that it offers the refinement, linear drivability and feel of a fully electric vehicle, along with the fuel economy of a diesel, in something you can fill from a petrol pump rather than a seven-pin cable.

The first generation of e-Power models (launching in 2016, there was a Note supermini and even a Serena MPV) never came to Europe, but the Qashqai became the first European e-Power Nissan with the second-generation hybrid system in 2022, and now bloods the third-generation version.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★½

PROS Greater commitment to e-Power concept saves weight and drives efficiency; more powerful than 48V rivals
CONS No 4WD option any more

Nissan's UK-based engineering team describe the Qashqai's new hybrid powertrain as the first clean-sheet reset that the set-up has had. It brings an all-new 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbocharged petrol engine, as well as a pair of permanent magnet synchronous motors of the sort you will also find in the incoming Nissan Leaf.

One motor is driven by the combustion engine via 'increaser' gearing, to act as a current generator. The other, outputting up to 203bhp and 243lb ft of torque and connected to the front axle via entirely separate 'reduction' gearing, is the car's only direct source of drive. Only now, the engine, both motors, both gearsets and the current inverter are integrated into one common '5-in-1' block assembly, in order to save weight and improve refinement.

The car's piston engine is an all-new design, with more undersquare cylinders than in the second-generation e-Power system, and with a bigger turbocharger – both modifications allowing it to produce greater torque at lower crank speeds. The engine redesign has also allowed Nissan to employ new lean-burn combustion control technology – called STARC (although as far as we know Iron Man had no part in its development) – and to fully optimise the motor for particular use as a power generator. The result is an impressive overall thermal efficiency of 42%.

Qashqai started crossover craze in 2006

The key fact remains, of course, that there's no mechanical connection at all between the car's reciprocating pistons and its front axle's driven wheels. As demand on the drive motor increases, piston engine speed may rise in order for the generator to supply sufficient system voltage to meet the demand, buffering power in and out of the car's 2.1kWh drive battery (located under the front seats) as it does so. As demand falls, the piston engine takes every opportunity to shut down. At no point does the car need to be plugged in, and yet it can undertake a significant percentage of urban journeys in electric mode.

The third-generation 'J12' Qashqai entered production at Nissan's Sunderland factory in 2021, using the firm's CMF-C/D platform (also used by the Renault Austral and Rafale and the Nissan X-Trail). If you don't want a full hybrid, it can be had in mild-hybrid form with a 1.3-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol instead, for either 138bhp or 156bhp. All versions of the car are now front-wheel drive, with Nissan's two-pedal Xtronic CVT available on the upper-tier 1.3-litre turbo petrol.

Where suspension is concerned, the Qashqai's offering is derivative-specific. Order either N-Design or Tekna+ trim, on 20in wheels, and you will get a multi-link rear axle; order anything on a smaller rim and you will get a torsion beam rear axle instead.

Nissan's exterior design tweaks for the 2024 revision of the car included a new three-dimensional, gloss black radiator grille; redesigned headlights with sequential LED turn indicators; and new tail-lights. The revised e-Power version gets updated door mirrors and a tweaked underbody aero package to help cut its drag coefficient. It can also be had on 17in wheels at entry-level Acenta Premium grade, in a bid to reduce rolling resistance and boost efficiency (although our test car was a Tekna+ on 20s).

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Controls are simply laid out and easy to interact with; adult-appropriate space in both rows
CONS Some rivals offer more space for the money; cabin lacks convincing style or lavishness

New radiator grille is a little bit eggbox-like. Nissan prefers to describe it as having a 'floating comma' look, with those to each side finished in satin chrome in contrast to gloss black. It does, at least, look different.

The front wheels have new aerodynamic lips in front of them to decrease the car's drag. Rim sizes now range from 17in in diameter up to 20in, but only cars with 20s also get multi-link rear suspension.

The Qashqai famously founded the modern crossover hatchback class, and while that class has diversified a great deal over the years, this car still sits towards its notional centre in terms of size and practicality. There are smaller, sportier and more desirability-driven models below it (Volkswagen T-Roc, Toyota C-HR, Mini Countryman) and there are larger five-seat SUVs above it (Volkswagen Tiguan, Vauxhall Grandland, Citroën C5 Aircross) – all of which compare closely on price. And then there are the premium-brand options (Audi Q3, BMW X1, Range Rover Evoque). The Nissan's aim remains to combine a broadly hatchback-like driving experience and fairly compact proportions with plenty of SUV-level space, comfort and versatility.

It succeeds at the space and versatility part quite well. Unlike in smaller crossovers, most adults will be able to travel in the back seats in plenty of comfort. A Kia Sportage offers a little more leg room but less head room, according to our tape measure. The Qashqai's boot space is a close match for the Kia's, beating it for maximum loading width and height but losing out in terms of seats-down loading length. Higher-grade models lose a little outright cargo volume relative to lower-tier ones (455 litres compared with up ▸

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN BRADSHAW

1 Tekna+ cars like ours cost an extra £3530, for which you get leather massage seats and a dashboard widely upholstered in suede. The effect of added premium feel is a bit limited.

2 Oblong drive selector feels plasticky and doesn't have the most reassuring haptic action as you engage drive or reverse, so you often look down to check you've got what you intended.

3 Upper-tier cars get a trio of digital consoles, one of which is a head-up display putting all key information close to your line of sight. You couldn't claim the Qashqai feels antiquated.

WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT A Steering offset 0mm B Brake offset 0mm C Accelerator offset 135mm right. Attentively placed pedals and steering wheel are all right where they should be, and the column has plenty of adjustment range.

◂ to 504 litres), but since our test car was in Tekna+ guise, clearly even that model offers plenty.

First appearing in 2021, this generation of Qashqai isn't desperately old, yet its cabin is laid out in a way that is quite alien to many recent debutants, with plenty of welcome physical switchgear.

Proper fixed heating and ventilation controls are in place and easy to use, and there are useful ADAS switches and physical audio controls. Nissan added a mix of leather and suede to range-topping models like ours last year in a bid to enhance interior ambience and better compete with premium rivals, but this still feels like a rather dry and monotone cabin lacking some character and charm. Nonetheless, it is solid-feeling, simply laid out and easy to interact with.

MULTIMEDIA

★★★★☆

PROS Good integration of connected Google features; good usability; separate heater controls
CONS Lacks a bit of 'wow' factor

The Qashqai's 12.3in NissanConnect touchscreen multimedia system was added in 2024, and improved the car's digital offering quite significantly. It offers full wireless smartphone mirroring but also has Google voice assistant, a Google Maps-based navigation system and Google Play networked entertainment options all built in, so if you have an Android-based smartphone in particular, it should work well for you. We found the wireless charging pad tended to overheat a phone quickly, however.

Although it lacks any physical or tactile input device, the screen itself is easy to navigate via either a navigation bar on the right-hand side or a tiled home screen. Flicking back and forth between native and mirroring modes is easy, and thanks to a custom ADAS setting accessed via the trip computer, you don't have to dive several menus deep on the touchscreen to deactivate otherwise irksome active safety systems.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★☆

PROS Less intrusive internal combustion engine; quicker than some hybrid rivals
CONS There is no full one-pedal driving mode

Look carefully around the Qashqai e-Power and you will notice plenty of refinement-boosting touches. These include foam padding inside the front wing cavities to prevent noise transmission via the wheel arches and an extra layer of foam carpeting under the boot floor. Clearly, one of Nissan's core aims for this car was to improve its NVH (noise, vibration and harshness) performance.

And it has hit that target right on the bullseye. Quietness in normal running is a striking attribute of this car. Whereas the previous e-Power, like other hybrids, was refined when driven under electric power but quickly became less so when the engine had work to do, the new one has a convincing hush about it even when the turbocharged triple is spinning.

That's partly because it has a smoother and better-isolated engine anyway, and also because that unit can produce what torque is needed at lower revs than the old e-Power. The combined effect of both factors was recorded by our decibel meter: the Qashqai generated 62dBA of cabin noise at a 50mph cruise, which is an impressive result especially given the 20in fitted wheels of our test car (Kia Sportage HEV: 63dBA, Peugeot e-3008 Allure: 64dBA, BMW X1 23i: 66dBA). Pick a car on smaller rims and you can expect it to be quieter still.

A distant three-cylinder chunter is all you really detect of the engine during everyday motoring. Except when you need full power, at which point there is a small but detectable delay in powertrain response while that engine spins up to sufficient revs to supply the voltage.

You wouldn't call this elastic band effect, because the car's electric drive motor has plenty of power and torque, for open-road acceleration and even normal overtaking, even before the engine hits peak power. Acceleration is dampened a little from rest – note how much quicker the car is from 30-70mph than from 0-60mph. But, otherwise, available power is plentiful, even at motorway speeds, and pedal response is very crisp and linear.

There's enough torque here to be able to maintain a decent cruising speed using 25% throttle or less. When you do, the engine runs only intermittently, to top

up the battery, which is typically maintained at between 50% and 70% charge.

The car's one-pedal drive mode doesn't quite bring it to a stop in traffic without any braking input, as an EV might, but it does allow you to choose between de facto strong and weak regenerative braking modes. Brake pedal progression and feel is good in normal driving, becoming slightly soft in more intensive use.

Our test car stopped consistently well, and strongly enough, in the dry. Its Michelin Primacy tyres struggled somewhat for mechanical grip on Horiba MIRA's wet surfaces, however. Their apparently hard compound combined with standing water to cause the anti-lock brakes to work a little noisily, though just about effectively enough.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★☆☆

PROS Supple and pleasant around town; agile and manoeuvrable enough

CONS Animated lack of body control on country roads; 20in wheels penalise ride isolation

The Qashqai e-Power's chassis engineers have clearly tried to follow the lead of their powertrain colleagues and boost this car's credentials as a comfortable-riding family car – but they have had less success.

It's apparent that the supple-riding, well-isolated rolling persona of a bigger SUV was what Nissan was aiming for here, and there is certainly decent absorption of bigger lumps and bumps, and a fairly fluent, easy-going motorway gait about the car.

But there is just a bit too much softness about the close body control, as well as a tendency for the body to over-react to inputs that affect one side of the axles or the other and to shuffle its weight laterally with plenty of head toss, while some brittleness affects the car's secondary ride too.

In the broadest terms, you might say that the car seldom seems to settle on its axles for long when in motion and has a cabin that's prone to disturbance by lots of unsprung mass, which never feels very well controlled. On smaller wheels and with a torsion beam rear axle, the car's ride could feel quite different, but we can't right now comment on exactly how.

There is reasonable agility and manoeuvrability about the car's handling, delivered through medium-paced steering of medium weight, about which there is little either to criticise or recommend. It doesn't feel like a particularly big car in tight spaces, and it corners assuredly and without much body roll for the most part – at least until you approach its adhesive margins.

The ESC system works well, and fairly unobtrusively, to keep the car on line and quell any drive-related understeer that a hasty right foot might cause a torquey electric motor to otherwise cue up. But you can turn it fully off – and when you do, you can become quite suddenly aware of the modest grip level of those Primacy tyres.

ASSISTED DRIVING

★★★★½

PROS System tuning isn't intrusive; custom mode makes it easy to switch things off

CONS There's no 'dumb' manual cruise control mode

Nissan's ProPilot suite of ADAS features for the Qashqai include, as standard, an AEB system with pedestrian and cyclist detection and junction assist; lane keeping and blindspot monitoring; driver monitoring; speed limit monitoring; and an intelligent cruise control. Mid-spec N-Connecta trim adds ProPilot Assist (which is semi-autonomous steering for the adaptive cruise).

The lane keeping and steering assist systems are easily toggled on and off via a physical button on the fascia; the driver monitoring isn't irksome or intrusive; and there's a custom ADAS mode, accessible via two button presses, through which you can quickly disable the monitoring nannies you don't want. So usability overall isn't annoying or distracting, and the systems seem well tuned.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★☆

PROS Great urban economy; easy to fuel and use; high equipment levels

CONS Range-topping versions are pricey; not as efficient as some at motorway speed

The Qashqai is offered through a simple five-tier derivative line-up, with two of those tiers – N-Design and Tekna – commanding identical prices but offering alternative balances of exterior style and interior equipment.

The car's mild-hybrid DIG-T derivatives certainly offer pretty convincing value, but an e-Power is almost £5000 more expensive than an entry-level DIG-T 140. Avoid Tekna+ trim and your car will be more comparable to key hybrid rivals on showroom price, though still more expensive than plenty – albeit well equipped for the money.

It will be efficient too. Our test car – on 20in wheels, remember, and so subject to improvement on smaller fitted rims – returned a very commendable test average economy of 50.4mpg; a motorway touring test result of 48.8mpg; and 'everyday' urban efficiency of 65.2mpg (Vauxhall Grandland Hybrid GS: 47.0mpg, 52.2mpg, 56.4mpg). For owners who drive mostly in town, there ought to be few petrol-powered direct rivals as efficient, excluding plug-in options. ▶

FRONT Leg room 1080mm, head room 1010mm. Driving position is medium-high, but easy to access, with good seat comfort and support.

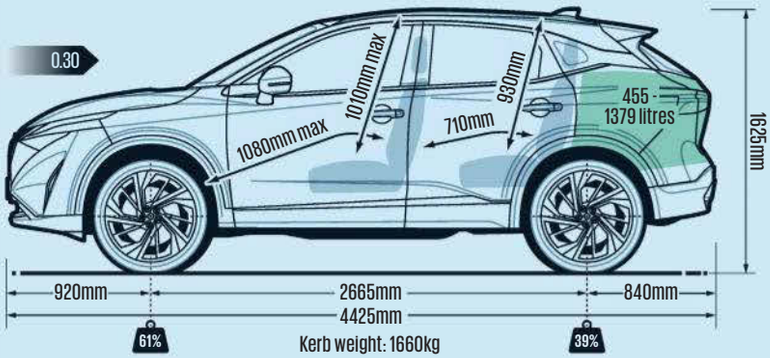
REAR Leg room 710mm, head room 930mm. You'll find roomier crossover options, but there's still space for adults back here, and a decent view out.

BOOT Length 850-1570mm, width 990-1380mm, height 430-540-840mm. Boot space is ample but other trims have more. Split-level floor is useful.

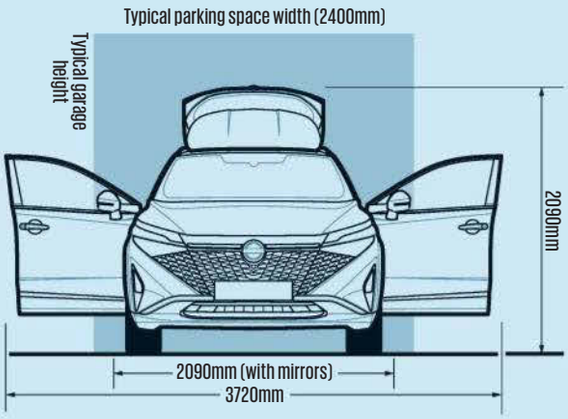
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 4425mm **Width** 2090mm/1835mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1625mm **Door span** 3720mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2090mm



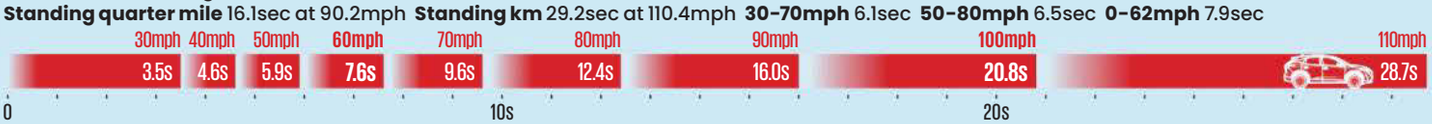
PARKING



ACCELERATION

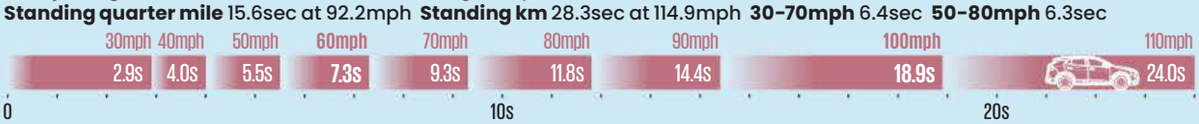
Test conditions 12deg C, drizzle

Standing quarter mile 16.1sec at 90.2mph **Standing km** 29.2sec at 110.4mph **30-70mph** 6.1sec **50-80mph** 6.5sec **0-62mph** 7.9sec



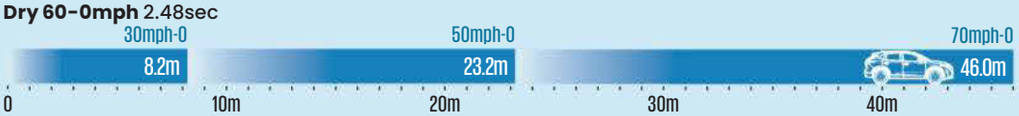
Kia Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S (2022, 10deg C, dry)

Standing quarter mile 15.6sec at 92.2mph **Standing km** 28.3sec at 114.9mph **30-70mph** 6.4sec **50-80mph** 6.3sec



BRAKING

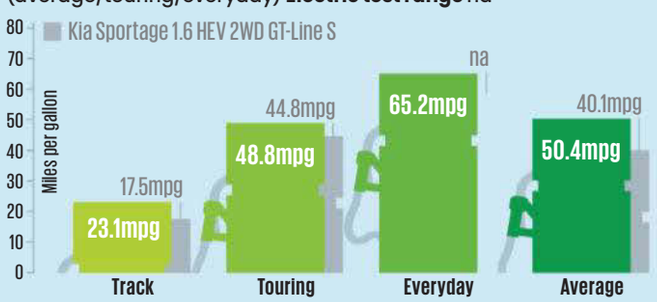
Dry 60-0mph 2.48sec



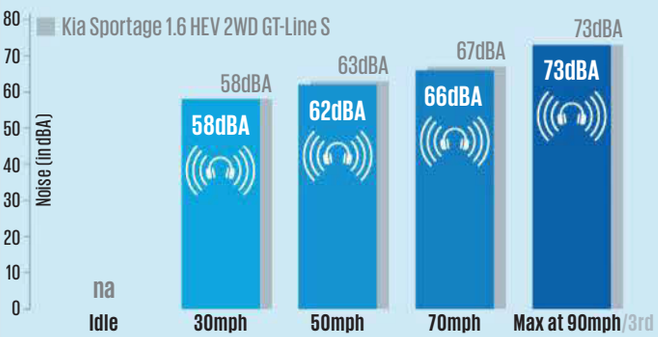
Wet 60-0mph 3.53sec

RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 61.4mpg (combined) **Test range** 610/590/789 miles (average/touring/everyday) **Electric test range** na

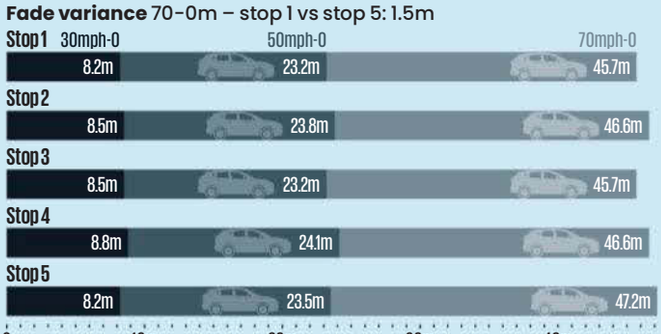


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: 1.5m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

NISSAN QASHQAI E-POWER TEKNA+

On-the-road price £43,210
Price as tested £43,210
Contract hire £412 pcm (£2472 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles, excluding VAT)
Typical PCP £532 pcm (£5000 deposit + 48 months/40,000 miles)
Insurance group 29

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard 20in alloy wheels, extended leather/suede upholstery, eight-way heated and massage front seats, adaptive LED headlights, 10-speaker Bose premium audio, glass roof with electric sunshade, 12.3in digital instrument screen, 12.3in NissanConnect multimedia display, 10.8in head-up display, dual-zone climate control, powered tailgate **Optional** Fuji Sunset Red paint with Pearl Black roof £0

HYBRID POWERTRAIN

Engine Front, transverse, FWD
Type 3 cyls in line, 1497cc, turbocharged, petrol; 156bhp at 4800-5000rpm; 175lb ft at 4000rpm
Motor Two permanent magnet synchronous motors; 203bhp, 243lb ft
Battery type NMC **Capacity** 2.1/2.0kWh (total/usable) **Voltage** 349V
Total power 203bhp
Total torque 243lb ft
Power to weight 122bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 146lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear
Reduction ratio 3.86:1

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel unitary chassis
Weight/as tested 1660kg/1681kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 61%/39%
Drag coefficient 0.30
Wheels 8.5Jx20in **Tyres** 235/45 R20 100V, Michelin Primacy 4 S1
Spare None (mobility foam)
Fuel tank 55 litres (under rear seats, filler on offside rear wing)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Rear** Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.5 turns lock to lock; 11.5m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 320mm ventilated discs, single-piston calipers **Rear** 292mm ventilated discs, single-piston calipers **Handbrake type** Electronic, switch on centre console

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating 5 stars (2021)
Adult occupant 91%, child occupant 91%, vulnerable road users 70%, safety assist 95%

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO_2 105g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £194/£389

VERDICT

Big strides for hybrid Qashqai, not least on efficiency

★★★★☆

Nissan's range-topping Qashqai hybrid felt doomed to fail an impossible mission – to keep a combustion engine and pretend to be an EV – when we first met it three years ago. Now, however, it has made that mission seem a lot more realistic.

New-found noise isolation and a less intrusive engine combine to make the car pleasant to drive around town, where it is also remarkably efficient.

Out of town it's a little less convincing, mostly due to a slightly restless ride and a lack of good close body control, and here the hybrid system's advantages are less in play. There is also a fairly high price to consider, plus a slightly humdrum design and positioning relative to some rivals.

In a market that's widely coming back to hybrids, though, this one has quite a lot going for it, and climbs in our estimations accordingly.

TESTERS' NOTES

MATT SAUNDERS
While particularly frugal around town, it can clearly also be efficient when cruising. Nissan did the 837-mile Land's End to John O'Groats run in one, and claims to have had 100 miles of range remaining in the tank.

RICHARD LANE
There is a selectable EV mode, but it would be good for only about two to three miles at urban speeds. That's more than you will get out of any 'self-charging' hybrid Toyota, mind you.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Bring some visual interest into the cabin.
- Retune the dampers and anti-roll bars for less head toss, and more settled body control at speed.
- Make the independent rear suspension standard fit, so it can be united with a smaller wheel for optimal ride quality.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3 NISSAN QASHQAI E-POWER TEKNA+	4	5	
	VW TIGUAN 2.0 TDI R-LINE DSG Slick, spacious, versatile. Shows how much car you can get if you stick with a conventional engine.	**HYUNDAI TUCSON HYBRID 2WD N LINE S** Not quite in the Nissan's league for efficiency, but strong practicality and performance.		**SKODA KAROQ 2.0 TDI 150 4x4 SEL DSG** There's plenty of space and clever functionality – and four-wheel drive. Don't overlook it.	**PEUGEOT 3008 HYBRID 145 GT** The 48V hybrid system is a bit weak next to the Nissan's, and not as efficient. Stylish, though.	**RENAULT AUSTRAL E-TECH 200 ICONIC** We've yet to test the updated car on UK roads, but European impressions suggest some key gains.
	★★★★☆	★★★★☆		★★★½☆	★★★½☆	
Price	£42,315	£41,320		£41,135	£40,420	£38,695
Power, torque	148bhp, 184lb ft	212bhp, 258lb ft		148bhp, 266lb ft	144bhp, 170lb ft	196bhp, 151lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	9.4sec, 130mph	8.2sec, 116mph		8.7sec, 126mph	10.2sec, 125mph	8.4sec, 111mph
CO_2, economy	146g/km, 50.8mpg	134g/km, 47.8mpg		149g/km, 49.7mpg	143g/km, 44.6mpg	108g/km, 58.9mpg

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MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing

Camera technology can be a massive boon for off-road drivers...

The BMW 7 Series I'm currently testing shows how it should be done: it's a big car and use of digital cameras really helps you to deal with its bulk.

I'm sure it was BMW that first offered the plan-perspective parking aid which it now calls Surround View. It's a composite image, delivered as if you were hovering about 30 feet above the roof of the car, in order that you know you've parked perfectly in the centre of the bay you're aiming at without getting out to check. It's a little bit of genius, digital technology enabling a perspective you couldn't get any other way – and proof positive that cameras do have their place on new cars.

A lot of the digital camera technology that I find in new cars isn't nearly so clever, however. Since cameras seem to be being used ever more widely and are now even influencing things like big-picture vehicle design, it's high time we lay some ground rules. Simple rules that you might not imagine needed stating at all, although they clearly do. Rules like: do the cameras in question actually work in the first place? Are they adding something or just doing a second-rate job at replacing something? And are they fit for the intended purpose to which they are put and the best way to achieve that purpose?

...but there are still several big problems with digital 'mirrors'

"The system was all but useless in murky, wintry conditions"

A camera system that makes parking so much easier satisfies such tests at a stroll. So does one that can make the bonnet of an off-roader seem to disappear, in order that you can drive over obstacles and through ditches with more confidence. Or a wireless one that you can attach to the underside of a car or the back of a trailer (anyone remember the L322-generation Range Rover's VentureCam? Scarily, it's nearly a 20-year-old idea).

But I have yet to test a digital rear-view or door 'mirror' that would pass any of those bars. The first such 'mirror' that I tried was on a Range Rover Evoque. I liked it, on an idyllic test route in the Peloponnese. It was supplementary, not a substitution, so you could easily use the real mirror instead. You certainly got a wider view of the road behind in camera mode and a brighter one for use at night.

When I drove an Audi E-tron with digital door 'mirrors' a few years later, however, I discovered the dirty truth: a low sun caused lens flare and road grime built up on the lens itself, exposed as it was at a fairly road-adjacent level. The system was all but useless in murky, wintry conditions.

Particular camera placement can be a problem in other respects too. If they sit too close to the side of the car, such as on the Lotus Evija, the image they produce is filled with bodyside and not enough of the road behind. That's annoying.

Furthermore, digital 'mirrors' can't yet replicate the parallax effect: the ability we all have to make the effective surface area of any mirror larger and to judge distances within it by simply moving our vantage point relative to it. On a video screen, you get the same view of what's behind you no matter how you move your head. You also have to actually focus on the screen, rather than on the object in the mirror, to use it, which can be a problem for those who wear glasses to drive.

In light of all that, should car designers really be reconfiguring vehicle bodies from a clean sheet, often removing useful 'through-vehicle' visibility in the process (have you ever noticed how much of your forward view in heavy motorway traffic depends on what you can see through the glasshouse of the car in front?), on the basis of the performance of camera technology that simply isn't good enough? You can probably guess what I think.

One day, these systems might be clever enough to track the position of your eyes; to keep themselves free of grime; and to compose some perfect image of the road behind us, in the way that the current 7 Series can of the particular parking space it's in. Until then, I will take good old-fashioned mirrors and plenty of glass, please.

BACK IN THE DOCK

The Nissan Leaf is starting out again – but the competition is way fiercer this time round. VICKY PARROTT brings the reinvented EV pioneer and two rivals to trial

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

A lot happened in 2010: a volcano erupted; Apple launched the first iPad; Lady Gaga wore a meat dress. It was all going on.

I had a few memorable moments myself, even if I didn't wear any bacon, get stranded due to Iceland's geological exuberance or buy one of those newfangled touchscreen laptops that didn't have a keyboard. They will never catch on… Anyway, Milton Keynes was the backdrop to one of my most striking memories of that year. Amid the roundabouts and glassy frontages, I walked into a shopping centre to be greeted by a cheerfully bug-eyed, blobby Nissan.

Here began the world's acquaintance with the electric car. Complete with a heady official range of 124 miles from a 24kWh battery and charging speeds of up to 46kW (if you could find a vanishingly rare DC car charger), the Mk1 Nissan Leaf was the first mainstream, mass-manufactured EV. It was an oddity that went on to change the automotive world.

Fast forward 15 years and here I am, on a windswept corner of northern Denmark, contemplating the all-new Mk3 Leaf against the backdrop of a UK electric car fleet of 1.6 million and a global electric car fleet of some 60 million.

Clearly, the new Leaf has a very different job to do in 2025 than the original did in 2010. Top of its to-do list is to persuade buyers that it's better than the other two cars here with us: the Kia EV4 and the Skoda Elroq.

While these cars are all new this year, and deliveries of the Leaf won't even begin until 2026, the Elroq has already established itself as the one to beat in the C-segment EV class. We gave it a four-and-a-half-star road test verdict for "having no compromise on efficiency, range, drivability or ride comfort".

The EV4 and the Leaf have their work cut out, then, but they're off to a good start, given that both improve on the Elroq 85's official range of 349 miles. The EV4 manages up to 362 miles, according to the WLTP test cycle, while at 375 miles the Leaf has the longest range of the three, despite having the smallest usable battery capacity.

We should mention that this is an unusual test, given that it is being conducted in Denmark during Car of the Year longlist judging. As such, the Skoda test car is non-UK specification, and to complicate things further Nissan has yet to confirm pricing and UK trim lines for the Leaf.

Suffice to say that all three cars are high-spec, and with the EV4 GT-Line hatchback and Elroq 85 (in something close to Edition trim) squeaking under the £40,000 mark to avoid the dreaded 'premium car tax', we would be very surprised if an upper-tier Leaf doesn't come in at a similar price when order books open later this year.

The immediate relief here is that the Nissan doesn't just feel like a rehashed Renault Megane. Even with the same CMF-EV platform beneath ▸

◂ it, the Leaf looks and feels every bit a 'proper' Nissan. I mean, is that a hint of 300ZX in the contrasting black panel at the back of the car?

As for how it drives, the Leaf has got a lovely, long-legged attitude as it soaks up the road surface, with the slim-rimmed two-spoke steering wheel allowing some of the road's texture to reach your fingertips. There's no confusing this for something with hot hatch ambitions; it's the friskier Megane or Cupra Born that you want. Instead, the Nissan eases down the road, feeling supple and controlled over bigger bumps. There is a bit of patter and suspension boom over eroded surfaces, but it's still tidy and pliant.

Having said all of that, you will probably want to avoid Eco mode, which neuters the throttle response and 214bhp front-mounted electric motor to the point of it feeling like it has just shrugged and given up. Not accelerating at all would, after all, be quite efficient. But it can also result in some buttock clenching if you have assumed a modicum of accelerative response when exiting a junction.

Punch in Standard or Sport modes and the Nissan livens up and flows nicely, tilting keenly into corners so that it feels satisfying if still more comfort-oriented than some others in the class.

After all, you do notice its weight moving around; none of these cars are lightweight, of course. But the Nissan's suspension travel is progressive and well controlled, without any jarring bump stops. It's just a very precise and confident car to drive, if a way off outright fun, which matches the airy, tech- and comfort-first attitude of the interior, too.

But before we delve into the cabin stuff, let's talk about the EV4. Blimey, Kia is on a roll, isn't it? If the Elroq is the one to beat in this class, the marginally smaller EV4 isn't far behind it for resounding capability. Let's just say it: if anything makes you wonder what Nissan has been doing for the past 15 years, it's Kia's stratospheric rate of progress.

Do you know what Kia launched in 2010, while Nissan was pioneering the mainstream EV? The Optima. Yup: a bastion of mediocrity, if ever there was one. Yet here we are in 2025 wondering if Nissan (which has launched only one all-electric model since the Leaf, the Ariya mid-sized SUV of 2022) can compete with Kia (which is launching its fourth and fifth EVs in the next few months).

Elroq is practical up front, in the second row and in the boot. Classic Skoda

Kia's infotainment is among the best around and takes the spoils here

Leaf's interior is both cheery (note the purple dash) and chatty through the wheel

"The capable-yet-comfortable attitude will be spot on for a lot of family EV buyers"

The good news for Nissan is that the Leaf absolutely can compete with the EV4. If anything, the Kia feels even more comfort-focused. If you can learn to love or at least live with the EV4's droopy nose and blocky surfacing, it's just as cushy and serene as the Leaf. In fact, the suspension feels a touch slacker, for a loping stride over most road surfaces.

It wallows a bit, but the ease with which it sponges over broken road surfaces – even the cobbles that feature in some of the Danish towns we pass through – is a delight in its own right. The general attitude of capable-yet-comfortable will be spot on for a lot of those considering a new family EV.

Mind you, for all of the EV4's determined attempts to show its hatchback-ness, the driving position is still fairly high – not at all far off what you get in the crossover-ish Leaf. Both also have similarly narrow rear visibility and will probably make you want a glass roof to lighten things up for anyone sat in the back.

The EV4's steering is a touch more remote than the Nissan's. It's still weighted well enough to be predictable, and with an appropriate wieldiness, but the EV4 always feels like a car that really doesn't care to be driven briskly at all. It whirs up the road with cheerful eagerness, though, and Kia's multi-level regenerative braking – which can be tweaked via steering wheel paddles with or without its adaptive function active – remains a benchmark. It's all absolutely fit for purpose, and you can't argue with that.

But Autocar has spent the past 130 years talking about how cars can be both comfortable and fun, and the rear-wheel-drive Elroq 85 proves that even your everyday family SUV can still do both.

Despite being the only car of our trio with a kerb weight in excess of two tonnes, the Skoda feels lighter on its feet than the other two. Its greater power and gutsier 6.5sec 0-62mph time are part of that, but it's more about the better control weights, pleasantly tuned steering and rather brilliantly controlled suspension, all of which combine to make the Skoda feel slightly more on its toes than the others here. Yes, I said it, and I'm not the only tester out here to think so: the closest thing to an SUV in this test is the nicest car to drive. Sorry about that.

Perhaps a less gaspingly scandalous statement is that the Skoda is also the more practical, if not by a huge margin. Chiefly, it's the fact that the Elroq offers a surprisingly low load lip and a spacious 470-litre boot, not to mention the best head room here for rear passengers.

The Kia and Nissan get a very serviceable 435 and 437 litres respectively, but both have surprisingly high load lips – particularly annoying given that you would assume the hatchback status would mean a lower one. Clearly the design departments won that argument… At least the Nissan gets a clever two-part, split boot floor that can be used to conceal your cable, as well as to separate the space and better secure the groceries after the big shop.

Less impressive is the Nissan's rear passenger space. Slide into the back of the Kia and Skoda and you will find masses of leg and head room. By contrast, the Nissan's roofline tapers enough to make taller adults feel a bit hemmed in, and leg room is also tighter than in the others. It will still be a very fine family car, but there's no doubt that the Nissan is the least roomy compared with the high standards set by the other two EVs here.

Up front, the Nissan does stand out with its textured white cloth inserts and purple leatherette dash. Yes, that's right: purple. Don't get me wrong, your Leaf interior isn't going to make you think of Cadbury's chocolate or Prince songs, but it's still definitely a dark purple. ▸

BIG BARGAIN USED ALTERNATIVES

BMW i5
FROM £38,000

Yes, you can already get an electric 5 Series for less than £40,000. So if you're happy to live with a saloon rather than a hatchback, this is a super-classy family EV. It has the sumptuous interior, on-road swagger, long range and tech you would expect of a car that cost some £70,000 when new only a year or so ago. If you want the i5 Touring estate, you're still looking at closer to £45,000.

PORSCHE TAYCAN CROSS TURISMO
FROM £40,000

It's hard to consider any new electric car without benchmarking it against a used Taycan. But at this sort of money, a used Cross Turismo estate is a realistic alternative. It's still a strikingly brilliant EV oozing that unmistakable Porsche aura of painstaking precision, and you won't find another electric car with a better everyday balance of ride and handling.

HYUNDAI IONIQ 5 N
FROM £45,000

It couldn't be further from the comfort-first attitude of these electric hatches, but we couldn't resist pointing out that you can now get a used Ioniq 5 N for £45,000. This frothing super-hatch is also a surprisingly usable family car, but if it is just a bit too much for you, the standard Ioniq 5 is also among our favourite used family EVs and you can get one from under £20,000.

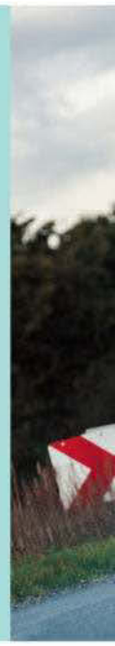
Elroq is the heaviest and tallest of our trio, but doesn't drive like it

REAL-WORLD RANGE

We all know that real-world range can be a long way from official figures. While we couldn't do the full economy assessment that's undertaken in our road test, we did do a shorter on-road route for this test, taking in some faster A-roads, as well as rural and town roads in mild conditions. It's still best to consider these figures an estimate, but the Leaf returned a range of 220 miles, the EV4 230 miles and the Elroq 266 miles – almost the same as its 270-mile road test touring result.

Given that Nissan has gone to great lengths to give the Leaf slippery aerodynamics, a heat pump as standard (expensive options on the other cars here) and a thermal battery management system, this is more than a bit disappointing.

Again, though, it's an early test, so we're certainly going to give both the Leaf and the EV4 another chance to prove their real-world efficiency in our full road test.



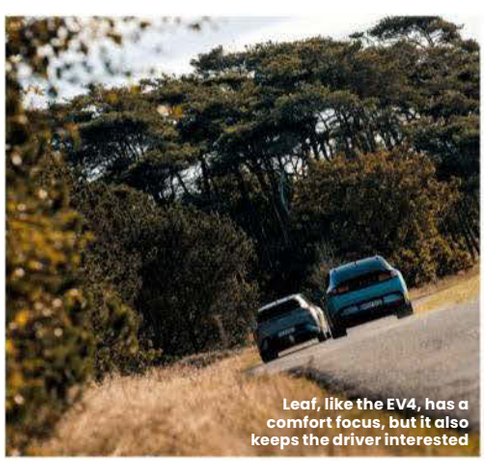
"The closest thing to an SUV in this test is the nicest car to drive"

Overall, it's a refreshingly bright, interesting blend of finishes, although I can see why some might prefer the more understated greys and monotones of the Kia – and especially the Skoda with its lovely, tactile textiles.

Sticking with the Nissan, the infotainment is good, not least as the shelf beneath the touchscreen makes the perfect wrist rest for more accurate prodding. Touch-sensitive shortcut buttons are an easy way of changing the temperature as well.

The EV4's infotainment system is much the same as what we have seen in other Kias, and that's no bad thing. It's the most intuitive of all of these systems, although the weird air-con screen that's hidden by the steering wheel is unnecessary.

Even so, all of the infotainment systems here are reasonably easy to use with a bit of familiarity, and all offer configurable shortcuts. Just mind out for that touch-sensitive volume bar that lurks at the bottom of the Skoda's screen, ready to wake the baby up when you accidentally hit max volume when all you wanted was the air to be a degree cooler… Other than that, all these high-spec test cars have the essential features, including navigation with a charger search function, wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto and over-the-air software updates.



Leaf, like the EV4, has a comfort focus, but it also keeps the driver interested

Numbers are tricky here, because neither the Leaf's prices nor its eligibility for the Electric Car Grant has been confirmed. However, Nissan is "very confident that the Leaf will be eligible for the full £3750", according to a spokesperson. And so it should be, because the Leaf will be the only mainstream electric car built in Britain. Even the battery plant is just across the road from Nissan's Sunderland factory.

Meanwhile, the Elroq – built in the Czech Republic – is eligible for the reduced £1500 grant, which will be applied across the entire range (except for the vRS, whose price exceeds the £42,000 cap). This may well prove to be the case for the Leaf when it goes on sale too. The EV4 hatch is built in Slovakia so might also get the £1500 deduction, but that's still unconfirmed. For now, Kia is offering its own equivalent £1500 discount on the cheaper Air model.

As for monthly finance, both the EV4 GT-Line and the Elroq 85 Edition come in almost exactly at £500 per month for those buying on PCP, with a £5000 deposit or part-exchange. Will Nissan usefully undercut those crucial monthly prices? We will have to wait and see.

Assuming that the Nissan is comparable on cost or cheaper, it comes out of this test very well. It's peachy to drive, with a bit more delicacy and involvement than the Kia, yet delivers a similar level of serenity and comfort. Its weakness chiefly concerns the more restricted passenger space, but otherwise it's an oddly charming car. It deserves to do well, not only because of its British-built status but also because it is a genuinely well-rounded and very capable electric crossover that has flashes of the ingenuity and creativity that Nissan is well known for.

Is it the best here? Probably not. While I would personally take the Nissan over the Kia (being able to tell everyone that my car has a purple interior is reason enough, surely), the EV4's long, seven-year warranty and roomier cabin are hugely persuasive selling points.

But it is the Skoda that takes the win. It proved the most efficient of the three for real-world range, is the best to drive, is the most practical and remains a routinely brilliant all-rounder that few others in the class can compete with.

With 375 miles, the Leaf has the longest range – by WLTP metrics at least

EV4 would rather flatten road surfaces than go hunting for corners

	SKODA ELROQ 85 EDITION	NISSAN LEAF 75KWH	KIA EV4 GT-LINE HATCHBACK
Rating	★★★★½	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Price	£37,160 (after EV grant)	£39,000 (est)	£39,395
Engine	Permanent magnet synchronous motor	Permanent magnet synchronous motor	Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power	282bhp	214bhp	201bhp
Torque	402lb ft	262lb ft	209lb ft
Gearbox	1-spd reduction gear, RWD	1-spd reduction gear, FWD	1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight	2115kg	1937kg	1896kg
0-62mph	6.5sec	7.6sec	7.9sec
Top speed	111mph	99mph	105mph
Battery	82/77kWh (total/usable)	75kWh (usable)	81.4/78.0kWh (total/est usable)
Range, economy	349 miles, 4.0mpkWh	375 miles, 4.5mpkWh	362 miles, 4.3mpkWh
Max charge rate	175kW	160kW	129kW
CO_2, tax band	0g/km, 3%	0g/km, 3%	0g/km, 3%

"Polestar fits me well because it's an agile, fresh, emotional brand"

‘We have lots of ideas’

New Polestar design chief Philipp Römers tells **JAMES ATTWOOD** how he plans to shape the Swedish EV start-up’s future and why his past will help

Design is important to every car firm, but it is absolutely rooted in the DNA of Polestar. The brand was essentially created from the hugely successful reception to a Volvo concept car, and such was the focus on design that Thomas Ingenlath, Volvo’s design boss at the time, was chosen to run it.

While Polestar is still young, it has a proven ability to stand out among a crowd of other electric-only newcomers and much of that stems from the strong design language, all stripped-back lines, reduced palettes and lashings of Scandi-cool. Even people who don’t know what a Polestar is like to drive probably have a sense of what one looks like.

All of which is to say that the role of design chief is more important to Polestar than to most car firms. So Philipp Römers, who started in the role in January as successor to Max Missoni, has some high expectations to meet – although that’s exactly what attracted him.

“Polestar is a design-driven company,” says Römers. “The former CEO was a designer and a lot of the company is built around design, and that really attracted me to the role. It fits me well, because it’s an agile, fresh, emotional brand.”

Römers, 46, has spent much of his career at the Volkswagen Group, including a stint at VW when he worked on the likes of the Golf Mk7 and Passat. His past 10 years have been at Audi, where, as head of exterior design, he worked closely with design chief Marc Lichte.

Römers began his career with Volkswagen but his first taste of a design studio came when he was at school and had a work experience placement at Ford.

His move came shortly after a shake-up at Audi, with Lichte leaving and Massimo Frascella coming over as the new design boss. Römers says he “could have stayed”, but the Polestar opportunity came up during the transition phase. “There’s always a moment when you should grab an opportunity,” he says.

While Polestar and Audi are both broadly ‘premium performance’ brands, Römers says the firms are “totally different”, with vast differences in their heritage (Audi can trace its roots to 1885 while Polestar was launched in 2017) and national identities. “The culture is different and Sweden is different,” says Römers. “Being in a different country affects the culture and collaboration within the company. And that’s part of the challenge – and it’s a good change.”

Still, the difference between Audi’s home in Ingolstadt, Germany, and Polestar’s in Gothenburg became abundantly clear on his first day back in January. “I arrived in the middle of a snowstorm and I thought: ‘Oh my god, that’s quite different,’” he laughs. “But from that day on, it got better and brighter. My family moved there two months ago and are settling in.”

As well as adjusting to Swedish winters, Römers is also adjusting to the difference in size between the two firms. “We have a much smaller team,” he says. “At Audi, my team was 150 people, just for the exterior ▸

From left: Polestar 4, 3 and 2 show a strong design ethos Römers wants to build on

Römers spent the past 10 years at Audi and was head of exterior design

◂ design. At Polestar, we have 61 people in the whole design team.

"It's much leaner, but that's not a bad thing – if you have the right people. It's more agile, so it's good. But we shouldn't be smaller: we are a brand that is growing and entering new segments."

By moving from a brand with a long heritage to one with very little, Römers faces a new challenge. Companies such as Audi and Mercedes-Benz have struggled to balance maintaining their design heritage while moving forward in the electric era. But Römers says succeeding at a brand without that rich history is a harder challenge. "With a manufacturer that has 100 years of heritage, you can always refer to elements of your DNA that are appreciated by the audience," he says.

Römers' highlight of his 10 years at Audi was leading the design of the E-tron GT.

While Polestar is growing, the trajectory of its sales has been uneven in recent years because the firm has felt the effects of being an EV-only brand at a time when electric demand is softening. Polestar's share price has also been hit, prompting the departure of Ingenlath, with industry veteran Michael Lohscheller taking over as CEO with a new brief focused on growing sales rather than building a brand.

"I came from a brand in transition at Audi to a brand which is also changing," says Römers, who believes his experiences at a car giant will help as Polestar grows, both in terms of sales and line-up, in the future. "In the VW Group, I worked on small cars, big cars, SUVs, sports cars – but I wasn't a free artist, so you learn to do the best with the prerequisites you have. That will help Polestar: we have to do the right things now. You can't afford to do everything, so you have to make good compromises here and there. That's something you learn working in a big group."

Although Polestar is part of the Chinese Geely group and still shares some technology and platforms with Volvo, it has a greater degree of independence and autonomy than some subsidiaries. With a small team and a small but growing line-up, Römers says that "clarity is key" to plotting out its future designs. And while it would be easy for a designer to step into a company and instantly put their own stamp on it, Römers isn't planning a revolution.

"I had a period of gardening leave [after leaving Audi] thinking about the brand and what to do," he says. "My first decision is that it would be bad to do a design revolution, because the brand is so young. I don't want to make a revolution. I want to do a bold evolution built on our values. That's a big challenge, no question. Our brand awareness is still growing, so we have to build on our existing design language."

During his time tending his shrubs, Römers says he also had "the topic of performance in mind". That's always been a value of Polestar, but it will be ramped up in the future. "It's a way to separate us from Volvo, to have a specific take," he says. "When I started, I had a close collaboration with the brand team, looking at sharpening the brand. So we really nailed the values of Polestar: design, performance and sustainability.

"So now, whatever we do is according to those values. That's something you have to be pragmatic about. For example, when you're looking at technology, you could put everything you have into a car, but then it's 'what do you stand for?', so now we make decisions based on our values. Is it design-driven? Is it performance-oriented? Is it sustainable? That makes things easier and clearer."

The next Polestar to go on sale will be the 5 super-saloon, a Porsche Taycan rival that has already been shown in production form. Römers must wait until the 7 compact SUV, now delayed until 2028, to launch the first car led by his design. But he's already offering some hints.

"Thomas was a designer, so everything was about design and sustainability, but performance was a little bit hidden," he says. "With Polestar 5, we are lucky guys: that's really

New 5's performance-led design will influence the 7 compact SUV, due in 2028

First CEO Ingenlath made Polestar a design-led brand from the off

Römers: "With the Polestar 5, we are lucky guys. That's the halo car"

Polestar treads its own design path, such as no rear screen on the 4

"A design revolution would be bad. I want a bold evolution based on our values"

the halo car, which is expressing performance at its best. So the 7 has to be influenced by it. That means something for the design."

To convey that performance feel in the exterior design, Römers hints that future cars will be more "horizontal, so they're more dynamic: a bit lower and sleeker, especially for an SUV."

One design trend that Römers won't be jumping on is making his cars look aggressive. "The cars have to look super-attractive and should not scare people," he says. "There's currently a trend where car makers are designing cars screaming out 'I'm here' and we don't want that. We should not look super-aggressive. Ambitious, but not aggressive. I don't think that would fit Sweden and we should really look like a Swedish performance brand."

Instead, the focus is on a design that's progressive: "It doesn't have to look friendly, but it should not scare people. Progressive can scare people. Or progressive can be like: 'Oh, that looks like a UFO, that's cool.' That's what I want."

When it comes to interiors, expect little to change: "We are already the benchmark when it comes to sustainable, modern materials. And this clean Scandinavian look was copied everywhere." But he confirms that the driver focus will involve expanding the provision of physical buttons.

Römers also says that the dashboard will shift from having the main touchscreen placed centrally to being more driver-oriented. Meanwhile, he has hinted that Polestar models could get a little bit brighter, hinting at a switch from monochrome to polychrome interiors – "a bit more emotional, albeit still in a very Scandinavian way".

While his design approach is one of evolution rather than revolution, Römers is still excited by the potential of his new role. He's aware that Polestar has "kind of a tough year behind us" but he can see the huge potential for the future.

"We have lots of ideas but we are a small brand and now we have to earn more money," he says. "We want to grow and that's why we decided to go into the crossover-SUV segment with the 7. But I'm so happy with the variety of cars we offer. It's great to have the Polestar 5 as a halo car: what other brand has such a halo? And when you buy a Polestar 7, you'll be buying a piece of the 5. That's a good thing for the future."

SUSTAINABILITY PUSH UNLEASHES CREATIVITY

As an electric-only brand, Polestar has had a focus on sustainability. It is notably opposed to the push by European car companies to roll back the 2035 EU ban on non-zero-emission cars and it also unveiled the Polestar 0, an attempt to develop a climate-neutral car.

As a result, Philipp Römers says sustainability will "always be part" of the brand. "Polestar was the first EV start-up in Europe and it was born sustainable," he says. "We have to be very transparent in terms of sustainability, which means we can't do whatever we want.

"We have to stick to sustainable solutions and materials. That unleashes creativity because we have to look for innovative yet sophisticated materials to help us. We have a high target of recycled aluminium within the platform and we are really stepping into every detail on every element of the car."

Are warranties warranted?

As the average age of cars and the cost of fixing them rise, aftermarket cover is growing in popularity. JOHN EVANS questions the wisdom

The nation's cars are getting older. According to the RAC Foundation, their average age is almost 10 years, an increase of 2.5 years on 2015.

A couple of reasons: it's becoming more expensive to change from an older car to a newer one and the rising cost of living is forcing household budgets to be diverted elsewhere. Another is the perception that cars are now more reliable and better made.

However, while they may no longer rust so quickly, modern cars do break down, no matter how well serviced they are.

Common failures include the traditional weak spots of timing chains, differentials, gearboxes and shock absorbers. And there are some newer villains too, including diesel particulate filters, wet belts, mechatronic systems and high-voltage coolant heater and air conditioning pipes – and this is before we include EVs, with their own fallibilities.

At the same time, parts are becoming more expensive. Owing to supply chain disruptions and increases in the cost of raw materials, their prices have risen by around 35% since 2020. Fitting them is also getting pricier.

According to a survey by What Car?, the average garage labour rate two years ago was £76. Since then it must surely have increased, due to wage inflation, increases in employment taxes and rising energy costs.

What can owners of older cars do to protect themselves from rising repair bills? Having your car serviced each year can help identify problems before they become expensive, but often faults occur unexpectedly.

There's not much motorists can do about these, which is why more of them are buying aftermarket warranties that are claimed to cover the cost of many unforeseen repairs. One leading provider says its sales of warranties have increased 14% each year for the past four years.

Is a used car warranty worth the money, though? At first glance, perhaps not.

Autocar contacted three providers and was quoted an average of £500 to cover a six-year-old Volkswagen Golf 1.5 TSI DSG with 57,000 miles for 12 months – a figure equal to its average claims payout, according to one company.

Of course, many payouts are much higher. The RAC says that its top five most expensive payouts last year each exceeded £19,000. The recipients of these will have been pleased, but critics of warranties say there are many claimants who receive nothing from their provider and so are anything but.

"Many of the bad warranties we encounter overpromise and underdeliver," says Ian Ferguson, founder of Reject My Car, a consumer redress service. "Coverage levels are rarely honoured and they have many hidden trapdoors. Their terms and conditions are verging on the unlawful. You wonder how anyone makes a successful claim. Some of the insurance-backed warranties we see are horrific – large excesses, restrictions on who can do the work, unfair contract terms that place the onus on the consumer… It all just leads to dissatisfaction. We are representing loads of people who are in dispute with their warranty provider."

Duncan McClure Fisher, founder of warranty provider Motoreasy, agrees the sector has its bad apples: "The problem area is the small independent dealer warranty offering a £500 limit and limited cover. Quite a few of the dealers selling them will buy a car at auction and sell it from their forecourt, slap on an £80 three-month warranty and make £2500, and all they want is the customer to go away and never see them again. Those warranties aren't really about the customer; they're about keeping the dealer happy. It's messy and a way of ducking their responsibilities under consumer law."

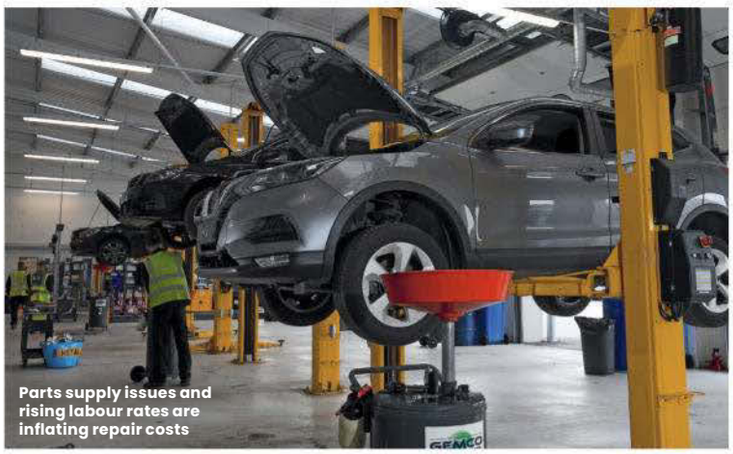
Whether a warranty is good or bad, it will have exclusions and small print. Last year, The Motor Ombudsman reported that in 2023 the number of warranty disputes it was asked to rule on had increased by 39% on the previous year. They included disputes over components and age and mileage terms, claims being turned down due to issues being categorised as 'wear and tear' and consumers not being aware of policy exclusions at the time of claiming (such as the need for their car to have a full service history).

The Motor Ombudsman reminded consumers they must read the warranty documentation carefully and understand its exclusions before buying cover.

McClure Fisher says that exclusions are a necessary evil: "Companies can't cover everything and can't afford to. Some components are very unreliable. In our experience, they include the electric rear drive axle on some hybrid cars. We've been trying to persuade the car makers to pay for those that have failed, but they won't, so we're no longer covering them. Some EV parts are also unreliable. For example, their air conditioning pumps, which are made to be lighter, present a whole new set of challenges."

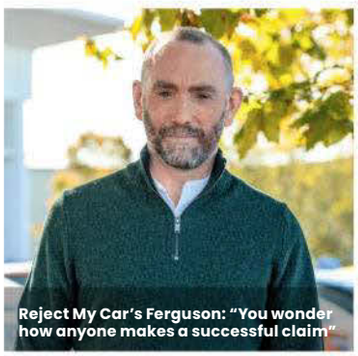
Strict terms and conditions are also necessary to prevent customer fraud, he says: "Buying a policy knowing their car has a pre-existing fault, ignoring red warning lights, allowing intermittent faults to drag on or deleting fault notifications are just some of the things some less honest claimants try."

Warranties have a bad reputation but, given the value of payouts that honest companies are making, one that is not entirely deserved. Motorists should protect themselves from bad providers by fully understanding the warranty's terms, conditions and exclusions before buying and checking customer reviews for the quality of the firm's complaints handling.



Parts supply issues and rising labour rates are inflating repair costs

Motoreasy founder McClure Fisher: "Companies can't cover everything"



Reject My Car's Ferguson: "You wonder how anyone makes a successful claim"

HOW TO BUY THE RIGHT WARRANTY

- Beware of warranties backed by insurance, because this way the provider has less freedom to decide in your favour.
- Make sure you understand the warranty's terms, conditions and exclusions, including limitations on who can repair your car and where.
- If offered the choice, decide what hourly labour rate you're happy with but don't limit the number of claims you're allowed.
- Don't take out a warranty that limits your cover to £1000, because the average claim is £500 and rising.

…and how to improve your chances of making a successful claim

- Before you buy a warranty, have your car serviced by a VAT-registered garage that will issue a proper invoice, so there's a reference point regarding the car's condition.
- Don't continue to drive with warning lights showing or with intermittent faults that might only make the fault worse and invalidate cover.

MONEY PITS AND GARAGE QUEENS

LEAST expensive cars to repair	MOST expensive cars to repair
1 Volvo XC40	1 Hyundai Ioniq
2 Audi Q2	2 Mercedes-AMG GT
3 Kia Ceed	3 Kia Optima
4 Peugeot 108	4 BMW X2
5 Vauxhall Adam	5 Bentley Continental
6 Infiniti Q30	6 Audi A7
7 Mazda CX-3	7 Mercedes-Benz S-Class
8 Tesla Model 3	8 BMW 5 Series
9 Ford Ka	9 BMW i8
10 Renault Captur	10 Porsche 911

Source: Motoreasy (based on nine years of warranty claims data)

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

"The humble HR-V has always stood out from the crowd"

FIRST REPORT

HONDA HR-V

Is this hybrid compact SUV still a strong contender? Let's find out

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To check in on a car that we really liked and a brand that has gone rather quiet

Like many others, I've fallen into the trap of thinking that most cars on the road today look exactly the same.

Even as a card-carrying member of the motoring nerd community, I often have to squint to spot the subtle differences that mark out, say, a Cupra from a Citroën – and there's no category I struggle with more than the B-segment crossover. A Toyota C-HR could be a Nissan Juke from a distance, and I've confidently misidentified a Volkswagen T-Roc as a Renault Captur on a murky evening.

The humble Honda HR-V has always stood out from the crowd, though. As it should: few seem to remember that it holds rank alongside the Matra Rancho as patient zero of the crossover curse. Should your memory need jogging, it arrived in 1999 as a three-door SUV built on the platform of the Honda Logo (when did you last see one of them, eh?), with space shuttle-esque looks that seemed more at home in the streets of London than the lanes of Wales.

Now in its third generation (the second one, based on the Honda Jazz, was a perfectly fine car but no trailblazer like its predecessor), the HR-V comes exclusively with a front-wheel-drive hybrid powertrain, badged e:HEV.

And it has just been treated to a mid-life update to enhance its design appeal still further, receiving a less rounded grille, a reworked front bumper, sharper headlights and some extra body shaping, particularly down the sides.

The Urban Grey Pearl example that has just turned up outside my house is in range-topping Advance Style Plus trim, differing from the standard Elegance by way of an electric tailgate, a heated steering wheel, adaptive headlights and a panoramic roof, among other niceties such as a wireless phone charger and uprated audio.

It has been optioned with the Obscura Black Pack, meaning that the sharp seven-bar grille, sizeable mirrors and lower bumpers front and rear are finished in – you guessed it – black, rather than being body-coloured. Paired with the black roof (which is something every crossover seems to feature now), it puts the finishing touches to what is already a surprisingly good-looking car. I love how those new headlights seem to poke out from under the bonnet and the Hofmeister-like kink where the C-pillar meets the bodywork.

Other visual curiosities include three dots hidden in the rear light bar surround to act as reversing lights – a quirky but not overcomplicated solution to the problem of where to put the bulbs, which I like – and blue trim on the lower doors, which I can't help thinking looks like someone has left the pre-delivery protection film on.

SECOND OPINION

I ran a Mk3 HR-V when it was new, back in 2022. Like Jack, I was initially drawn to the Honda by its looks, but it was the car's calm and comfy nature that really endeared me to it. In fact, I happily drove it all the way to Italy. The driving experience is smooth and efficient, more akin to an electric car than a hybrid. But I do feel that Honda hasn't changed it enough to grab the attention of new customers. **KC**

I like the interior even more. It's refreshing to see a major manufacturer such as Honda forgo a screen-heavy approach: the 9.0in touchscreen in the HR-V is as large as I'd ever want one to be. On first impressions, the infotainment system is decent, being easy to navigate and quick to respond to

This is more of a comfort crossover than a sporting one

Cabin has had a subtle redesign; gearlever has lost its raised surround

your commands. And the leftmost portion of the driver's display can be customised to show just about anything you would want to know about the car, ranging from average journey speed to fuel economy, and has incredibly smooth graphics.

Even more welcome is that the HR-V still has physical climate controls. Yes, there are still some cars on sale in the UK in 2025 that don't force you to try to navigate a tablet strapped to a dashboard in order to keep the cabin at a comfortable temperature. They're nice to use too, being helpfully ridged so your fingers don't slip off. Everything else related to the climate is controlled by individual buttons along the same interior line.

The cabin is full of materials that are pleasing to the eye and to the touch. Faux leather gives the dashboard and seats a bit of contrast, with the latter finished mostly in a soft fabric. I've long been an advocate of fabric seats over leather ones, which get too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter.

It's much the same in the capacious rear, where the bench consists of Honda's Magic Seats – a clever design where the base can be folded up to create a massive extra storage area in the footwells.

The boot is among the larger ones in this class, too.

Under the bonnet is a 1.5-litre four-cylinder atmo petrol engine with 106bhp, and a pair of electric motors bring the total output up to 129bhp, with power being fed to the wheels through an e-CVT.

Those three letters strike fear into the heart of anyone who cares about cabin isolation, but I was impressed with the smoothness of the similar transmission in the Toyota Corolla hybrid I ran a while back, so it might not be a problem.

There is a lot to like about the HR-V, and the aim of running one over the coming months is to see if this minor update is enough to keep it shining in the sea of blandness that is the crossover market.

JACK HARRISON

TEST DATA

HONDA HR-V 1.5 i-MMD E:HEV ADVANCE STYLE PLUS

Price new £39,535 **Price as tested** £43,085 **Options** Obscura Black Pack £1750, Urban Grey Pearl Paint £700, Illumination Pack £565, dog guard £360, floor mats £175 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 52.3mpg (WLTP)

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VW GOLF GTE

Our man tries to prove the haters wrong about his hybrid hot hatch

MILEAGE 2992
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see if the latest hot PHEV Golf is truly a wallet-friendly alternative to the GTI

Spot the difference: GTE has new plate

I've been really enjoying the Golf GTE. This plug-in hybrid hot hatch has so far proven extremely easy to live with, it's incredibly comfortable, it's returning very good economy and in my view it sports a rather dashing look. Insert 'do you really need more car than this?' comments here.

(For the eagle-eyed among you who may have noticed something different about my GTE, be assured that it's the same rather dashing car as before. Volkswagen's PR team just needed somewhere to put one of their special numberplates.)

The only problem that I've encountered (and it's one I could choose to ignore) is hot hatch fans – including Autocar's own Golf GTI-owning Jack Warrick – saying the GTE has all the gear but no idea; that it gives off a sporty persona without being able to back it up.

Warrick noted in his review that "it doesn't quite excite in the way its badge might suggest" and "the purer GTI is more attractive to the driving enthusiast".

I do get this criticism, but I have a rebuttal. I believe we should look at it from another angle and ask: is this car engaging enough for the average driver?

To test the theory, for my past few commutes home I have avoided the M3 and headed down the A31 and its many neighbouring B-roads.

And do you know what? I had fun. No, it's not a GTI. You don't get the same connection through the steering wheel, you don't get to enjoy the creamy EA888 turbo engine and you're always aware of the electrical componentry's additional weight. Yet there are still genuine thrills to be had.

The instant shove of the electric motor gives the GTE a punchy feel out of tight bends, and once the petrol engine joins in, the car pulls with gusto. The steering has enough weight and accuracy to inspire confidence, grip levels are strong and body roll is kept well in check. This isn't a car that eggs you on relentlessly, but it is one that responds positively if you decide to press a little harder.

The real test for an enthusiast is whether a car makes you want to drive it for no reason at all. I admit that I am not waking up any earlier on a Sunday desperate for a blast in the GTE – but I now find myself opting for the slightly longer route home, and that's a good thing.

WILL RIMELL

LOVE IT

FAKE FRIEND
Don't laugh at me, but I like the synthesised engine noise that's pumped into the cabin when I activate Sport mode.

LOATHE IT

BLAND DESIGNS
I wish the interior were a bit livelier. It just feels quite grey and dull. I recently spent some time in a Peugeot 308, and its cabin was a breath of fresh air.

TEST DATA

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTE

Price new £40,140 **Price as tested** £44,435 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 53.8mpg **Last seen** 1.10.25

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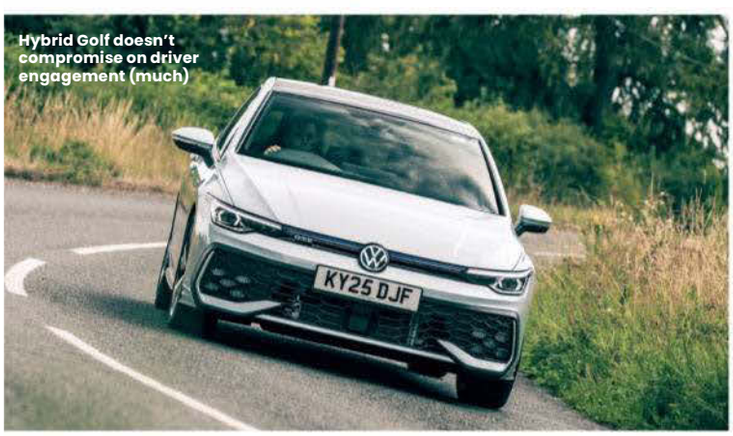
will.rimell@haymarket.com



Hybrid Golf doesn't compromise on driver engagement (much)

JAECOO 7

Holiday trip presents first stern test for our cheap Chinese petrol SUV

MILEAGE 1098
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To find out why newcomer Jaecoo is one of the UK's fastest-growing brands

My mission to discover how the Jaecoo 7 stands up to the rigours of family life got off to a good start with a trip to Somerset to visit my parents for a few days over a long weekend. That meant kids, dogs, bags, walking gear and more, which would provide a stern test for the 145bhp 1.6-litre turbocharged petrol engine.

With those 'kids' now aged 19 and 16, the prospect of a long motorway journey in the back seats is usually greeted with groans, but both daughters were impressed by the Jaecoo. Although the rear bench is fairly low-set, they were pleased with both how much elbow and leg room they had and the amount of creature comforts: even rear-seat passengers get heated seats and a pair of USB charging ports. And in spite of their maturing years, they were thrilled to discover the additional set of controls on the side of the front passenger seat (in China, being chauffeured in your car is a sign of success), which meant they could move Mum's seat into uncomfortable positions while she dozed to give her a surprise upon waking.

The dog in the boot was a bit less happy. Although it's a nice, square shape and easily big enough for day-to-day use, its 412 litres are quite quickly filled with bags, leaving his bed hemmed into the corner and him with a very high load lip to negotiate. It isn't helped by the load-bay cover, which makes it shallow and is mounted a good few inches aft of the rear seatback, leaving a gap through which the contents it's supposed to conceal can be seen.

All passengers were comfy – well, apart from poor old Jeff

Up front, it's a game of two halves. No complaints about the luxury of the heated and ventilated seats (standard on the AWD version, it being tied to Luxury trim), the heated steering wheel or the light pouring in from the glass roof, but the climate control could be more responsive and, although there is four-way electrically adjustable lumbar support, I find the front seats flat and unsupportive, leading to an ache in my lower back after a long drive.

All loaded up with somewhere to go, I could immediately feel the difference in the way the Jaecoo drives. Because it's softly sprung, when fully laden it rolls like a boat in corners, forcing me to take it easy on country lanes. The weight makes a noticeable difference on the motorway too, with the drivetrain struggling to maintain 70mph in the Eco mode to which it defaults every time the car is turned on.

Often such modes don't mean much, but in the Jaecoo they make a huge difference: Sport is a bit too aggressive in town, while Normal makes it feel much livelier off the line and quicker to downshift to maintain momentum once up to speed without a big drop in MPG.

On which subject, both the official claims and those made by the car's on-board computer appear pretty accurate: the 35.3mpg WLTP figure is disappointing, but on varied roads on a long drive I got close at just over 33mpg on a fill-to-fill test, which was corroborated by the dashboard readout.

Presumably the plug-in hybrid Jaecoo would do much better (even the FWD Deluxe version of the pure-petrol model will do 37.7mpg).

It would also cure one of my other gripes about the car: without even a mild-hybrid element, it's slow to react to the engine start-stop system; and with no auto-hold function, on an incline it will roll back an alarming distance before the engine fires and the gearbox takes up drive unless you're nimble on the pedals or engage the electronic parking brake each time.

However, while I arrived at our destination a little disappointed as a driver, I was happy enough as a father and a husband, because the rest of the family had enjoyed the journey without complaint.

ALASTAIR CLEMENTS

LOVE IT

BIG-SCREEN STAR

There's a space race in the world of in-car screens, but surely few can better the 14.8in monster the Jaecoo gets in AWD Luxury spec.

LOATHE IT

SILLY NAME

I wish people would stop asking me about the badge: the fusion of 'jäger' (German for 'hunter') and 'cool' makes 'Build Your Dreams' sound almost normal.

TEST DATA

JAECOO 7 1.6T AWD LUXURY

Price new £32,850 **Price as tested** £32,850 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 30.6mpg **Last seen** 24.9.25

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SKODA ELROQ

Electric car plus 400-mile day equals... minimal stress

MILEAGE 2715
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT Is this sensible, long-legged compact SUV the perfect beginner's electric car?

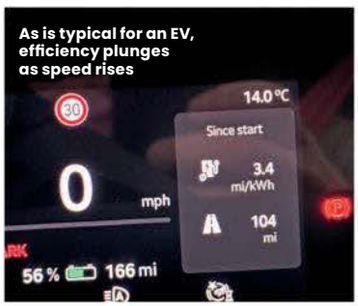
I'd not long had the Elroq before it was pressed into service for some fairly arduous long-haul work.

After a couple of days pleasantly trundling around London suburbs, where it quickly impressed with sublime low-speed drivability and commendable efficiency, it was time to properly test this compact SUV's do-it-all credentials with a few hundred motorway miles – an endeavour that can so often be the undoing of an otherwise-agreeable EV, given the energy demands and NVH implications of sustained high-speed cruising.

First was a run up to Crewe for an early look at Bentley's new brand-shaping EXP 15 concept. And when I say early, I'm not just referring to pre-embargo access but the sickening 4am start necessitated by our tight schedule. Correctly predicting that I wouldn't have much patience for public chargers at such an early hour, I 'brimmed' the 82kWh battery the day before and had a confidence-inspiring 343 miles of range on the display when I set off.

Up until the M25, that figure declined at almost exactly the same rate as my remaining distance, but once free of the capital's Orwellian 20mph zones and barrelling along at 70mph, the gap between the two numbers started to widen. By my first rest stop, I had travelled 110 miles but lost a displayed 140, with the car's efficiency falling from a decent 4.3mpkWh in town to a less brilliant 3.4mpkWh, corresponding to a motorway range of 279 miles.

From there on, I kept an eye on my 'comfort buffer' – how much juice I was forecasted to have left by the time I parked up at Pyms Lane. Initial calculations suggested I would have 106 miles remaining, but as I needed to maintain a constant 70mph and it was too warm to have the air-con off, that safety net gradually shrank as the miles rolled by, and I ended up with just 80 miles left as I threaded the Elroq gingerly in between the brazenly specified Bentaygas and Continentals in Bentley's car park.



As is typical for an EV, efficiency plunges as speed rises

No huge issue, as an on-site 22kW charger took the displayed range back up to the mid-100s while I was being immersed in the future of VIP transportation. And that meant that even after a couple of hours of zipping around Cheshire lanes for some photos, I still had enough to get me down to my in-laws in Sutton Coldfield, where I was ecstatic to find a freshly installed bank of E.ON chargers, which got the battery from 15% to 68% in just 20 minutes at an average charging speed of 139kW while I had a coffee.

All in, not a bad day on the blacktop for the Elroq. I didn't really spend any longer stationary than I would have done in an ICE car, and even if the motorway range is far less than the official maximum of 354 miles, it's still enough for you to drive until your bum gets numb.

Otherwise, I have little but praise for the Elroq's comportment over long distances. Its intuitive in-car tech meant I didn't have to fumble around bleary-eyed at the crack of dawn to configure my ADAS settings and set my route; it remained quiet and oh-so-smooth at high speeds; and because our car is fitted with the sinfully decadent Maxx Pack (£5100), I was even able to sneak in a cheeky massage in the final miles.

Much like the Airbus A380 soaring away from Heathrow in the photo below, the Elroq has proved a highly dependable and impressively comfortable means of covering large distances. Not sure I'm up for taking it to Singapore, mind.
FELIX PAGE

TEST DATA

SKODA ELROQ 85 EDITION
Price new £38,660 **Price as tested** £47,140
Faults None **Expenses** None **Range** 279 miles
Economy 3.4mpkWh **Last seen** 1.10.25

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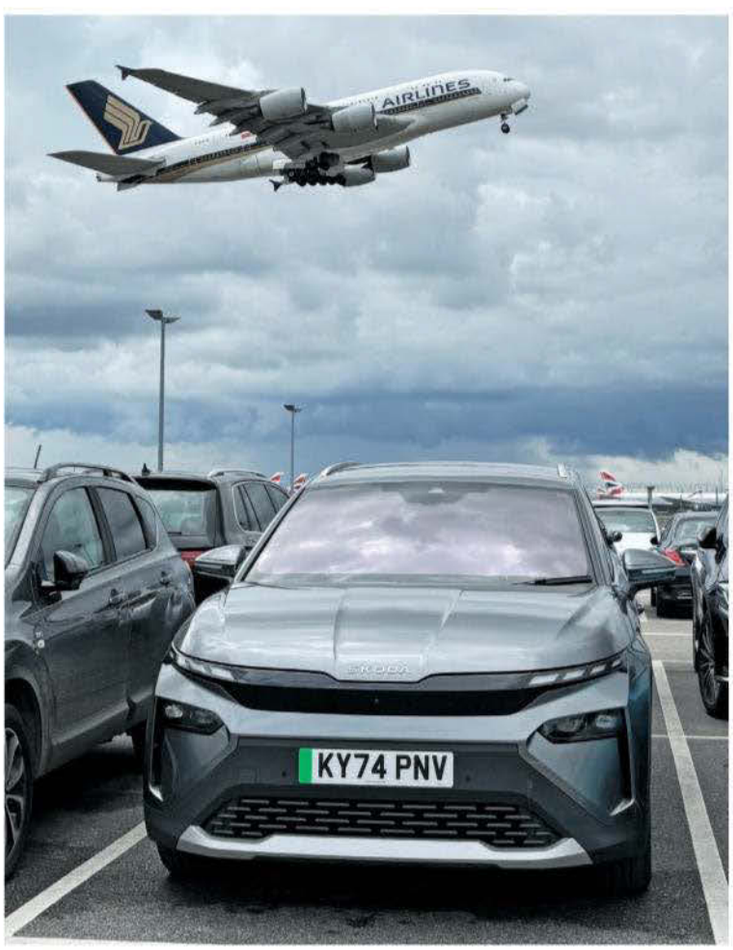


LOVE IT

SMALL COMFORT
Curiously, our high-spec car has the smallest wheels available, at 19in. They look a bit wee but the Elroq rides excellently as a result.

LOATHE IT

PULLING MY LEG
If the Volkswagen ID Buzz can forgo a centre console, why can't the Elroq? I'd love to be able to slide out of the passenger door in a tight space.

SNAPSHOTS

RANGE ROVER EVOQUE
Mileage 3382 **Last seen** 1.10.25
The Evoque's Clearsight digital rear-view mirror is proving a hit with my son but less so with me. "I have TV in the car!" he says, while I'm left feeling a little queasy. Via a simple toggle underneath the mirror, it switches from a regular view to a screen that uses a rear-mounted camera to show a wide-angle view. If you had tall people in the back or a boot full to the roof, it would certainly be helpful. **RB**

POLESTAR 3
Mileage 4074 **Last seen** 24.9.25
Summer's behind us, but one part of it has lingered: the sun cream on the 3's seats from the backs of my legs. Ugh indeed. The recycled material is great for sustainability but less so for keeping clean (I've done my best – see above). Of more appeal is the wool option you can also choose for your 3's seats. I'm keen to sit in one with that. **MT**

MAZDA CX-80
Mileage 3960 **Last seen** 24.9.25
I pride myself on my parking skills, but I'm still not used to the yawning arc required to reverse this SUV into a bay, what with its absurd 4995m length, 3120mm wheelbase and 12.4m turning circle. Much more problematic, though, is its 1890mm width. I'm glad I'm in good physical shape, because the contortion you see above is a twice-daily necessity in the busy 1970s multi-storey we use at the Autocar office. **KC**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A HYUNDAI TUCSON

THE SUV FAMILY FAVOURITE THAT GIVES MORE FOR LESS

No-nonsense, roomy Mk3 Tucsons are plentiful, practical and affordable

Launched in 2015, the third-generation Hyundai Tucson quickly became a family favourite SUV in a fiercely competitive segment – and the firm's best-seller in Europe. Which is good news for today's used buyer, because it means there are plenty of them on offer in the classifieds.

Sift through them diligently – there can be reliability issues with some, as we will explain – and you can bag yourself a practical, well-equipped, cavernous bargain.

The Mk3 Tucson line-up is relatively straightforward to decipher, with a range of pure petrols and diesels, plus a 48V mild hybrid. All engines are ULEZ-compliant, but there are no full-hybrid or zero-emission variants.

At launch, there was a choice of two 'Gamma' 1.6-litre petrols: a naturally aspirated unit with 133bhp and a turbocharged version with 174bhp. On the diesel front, buyers could pick a 113bhp 1.7-litre or a 2.0-litre with 134bhp or 181bhp.

All engines came as standard with a six-speed manual and front-wheel drive except for the 181bhp 2.0 diesel, which was four-wheel drive only. The 134bhp 2.0 diesel offered 4WD as an option.

A seven-speed dual-clutch automatic was optional on the 1.7 diesel and a conventional six-speed automatic could be paired with the two 2.0-litre diesels.

No variant is bad, but we would avoid the petrols: the atmo 1.6 can feel sluggish, the turbo version is on the thirsty side and there are reliability concerns (see Buyer Beware, right). Of the diesels, the

All models are well equipped, easy to operate and spacious

What we said then
27 AUGUST 2015
"We'd go for the SE Nav version with the quieter and more efficient 1.7-litre diesel. It doesn't do away with too many luxuries and, in the real world, doesn't feel much slower than the 2.0-litre diesel. Admittedly, that model isn't available with four-wheel drive, but that's unlikely to spook many buyers. Put some of the saving towards a set of winter tyres instead and enjoy."

1.7 is our pick because it is notably more refined than the 2.0 units and offers adequate grunt for everyday use with decent fuel economy.

All Tucsons offer plenty of space. Front and rear passenger room is excellent and its 513-litre boot is nearly 100 litres larger than a Nissan Qashqai's, although you won't get the perceived material quality on offer in the Qashqai.

But you will get an impressive roster of equipment. All versions come with autonomous emergency braking, LED daytime-running lights and reclining rear seats, while some have luxuries like ventilated cushioning and adaptive cruise control.

Trims begin with S and rise to SE and SE Nav, with Premium topping the range. There was also a Sport trim with big wheels, which don't help the ride.

In 2019, Hyundai broadened the range with a light facelift. The petrols were carried over little changed but the turbocharged variant gained the dual-clutch automatic as an option. For the diesels, a 1.6-litre replaced the 1.7 and could be had with 113bhp or 134bhp, with the option of the dual-clutch 'box in the higher-powered variant. The 2.0-litre diesel became four-wheel drive and auto only, gaining a slight power boost to 184bhp courtesy of a 48V mild-hybrid system.

As for equipment, a larger infotainment screen, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, and a 360deg camera all became available.

If you're worried about reliability concerns hurting residuals in the long run, prices are already quite cheap – starting at £4500 – and there are enough examples out there to find a well-looked-after one.

Our pick, a 1.7-litre CRDi with a manual gearbox, is the cheapest one today because buyers are cautious about diesels. And road tax (VED) will be just £35 for those registered before 1 April 2017.

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

For a two-tonne SUV, the Tucson handles tidily enough

"Our pick, the 1.7-litre CRDi diesel with a manual gearbox, is also the cheapest one today"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW
MICHAEL KEMMET

"I've owned my 2016 Tucson 1.7 CRDi for over seven years. The only expensive bill I've had was for a new electric handbrake switch, at over £300, not including labour. My other costs have just been normal wear and tear items. Overall, the car has been brilliant, including towing our caravan on all our holidays. I'm aware that other owners have had far worse luck, but I know the diesels are more trustworthy. Nevertheless, I have an oil change every year or around 6000 miles for peace of mind."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ ENGINE
The 1.6-litre 'Gamma' petrol engine has a poor reliability record. We spoke to a Hyundai/Kia mechanic who advised avoiding it because it's not uncommon for piston rings to fail at 50,000 miles – the telltale sign is excessive oil consumption – resulting in the need for a replacement engine. Owners suggest changing the oil every year or 5000 miles, instead of the two years and 20,000 miles recommended by Hyundai, but that isn't foolproof.

Glow plug faults are common on the 2.0-litre diesel. Expect to pay £1500 for a fix.

■ DIESEL PARTICULATE FILTER
On diesels, the DPF can be an expensive problem. An illuminated warning light may indicate a failure to regenerate or the AdBlue injector failing. Either issue can cost thousands to fix. To help prevent problems, regularly undertake a reasonable motorway drive. Also note that pre-facelift Tucsons do not have AdBlue.

■ GEARBOX
The synchromesh in manual cars can prematurely fail, requiring a replacement gearbox. Look out for noisy, difficult changes. Dual-clutch cars are prone to getting stuck in gear.

■ FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE SYSTEM
The rear driveshaft can fail on 4WD Tucsons and it isn't a cheap repair. If left unresolved, vibrations may damage the gearbox and leave it irreparable.

■ ELECTRICS
They're temperamental at best. Door locks, handles, window switches and electronic parking brake switches often fail. Parts

from Hyundai for a handbrake switch cost as much as £550. ABS, traction control, engine management and auto hold lights are reported to be regular dashboard features, often requiring a new sensor. Sat-navs are easily confused about where they are currently located and some owners have reported the screen delaminating.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING
Rivals such as the Mazda CX-5 and Renault Kadjar are ultimately better-rounded but are pricier, so the Tucson is something of a bargain for the space on offer.

The split in the classifieds is slightly in favour of the petrols, while one in five is an auto and just one in 10 is 4WD. Even so, there is a good number of all variants available.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£4500-£5499
Early, low-spec cars with a six-figure mileage and worn-looking exteriors and/or interiors.

£5500-£8499
A broad range of pre-facelift cars with 50,000 to 100,000 miles under their wheels and some in desirable Premium specification.

£8500-£12,499
Plenty of facelifted models and low-mileage pre-facelift cars.

£12,500-£20,000
Top-spec, low-mileage 2019, 2020 and 2021 Tucsons. N Line and Premium SE mild-hybrid diesels are the dearest.

ONE WE FOUND
HYUNDAI TUCSON 1.7 CRDi SE NAV, 2015, 66,500 MILES, £8094
This 1.7 is £35 a year to tax and its rare red metallic paint helps it stand out. Kit includes heated seats and a reversing camera.

My car & I

Terrible, terrifying and yet tremendous

"I could drive it to the moon and back and run over everything on the way," says Tom Exton about his Brabus Mercedes G500 4x4², also known as the G500 Squared. I don't doubt it. In addition to the 'regular' Squared's gains over the standard G500 (more than twice the ground clearance, thanks to the fitment of portal axles, a wider body, deeper wading capability, larger 22in wheels and steeper approach and departure angles), its Brabus-tweaked bi-turbo 4.0-litre petrol V8 produces 493bhp, up from 416bhp.

Not that Tom claims to care much about any of this. Instead, for him, that it can conquer almost any terrain is sufficient reason to own it: "You can drive up and down flights of stairs, through lakes and all sorts of useful stuff – although I've yet to experience any of that driving around Wimbledon Common."

He bought his G-Wagen almost three years ago but, despite its ability to go anywhere, has covered just 1000 miles: "It's atrocious to drive and not something you want to do long drives in. The steering doesn't really do anything and you're never sure where the corners are; you're just up there guessing. It keeps you on your toes. Also, it's not air-sprung, so it doesn't waft

Our cars

Oops, I've bought another leggy old Alpina

BY ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

I recently acquired this slightly rough-around-the-edges 2004 Alpina Roadster for a more than reasonable sum.

I spotted a vague, pictureless advert on an online forum and my interest was piqued. Could it be a mystical BMW Z1-based Roadster Limited Edition? I mean, it could have also been a Z8-based Roadster V8, but as it was listed for five figures, that seemed unlikely...

After asking for pictures, I realised it was a Roadster S, the most common Alpina Roadster – the one based on the BMW Z4. Still, only 370 were ever made (167 in right-hand drive), so it's hardly common. Plus, it has the 296bhp 3.4-litre straight-six petrol engine from the B3, which can rev to 7300rpm.

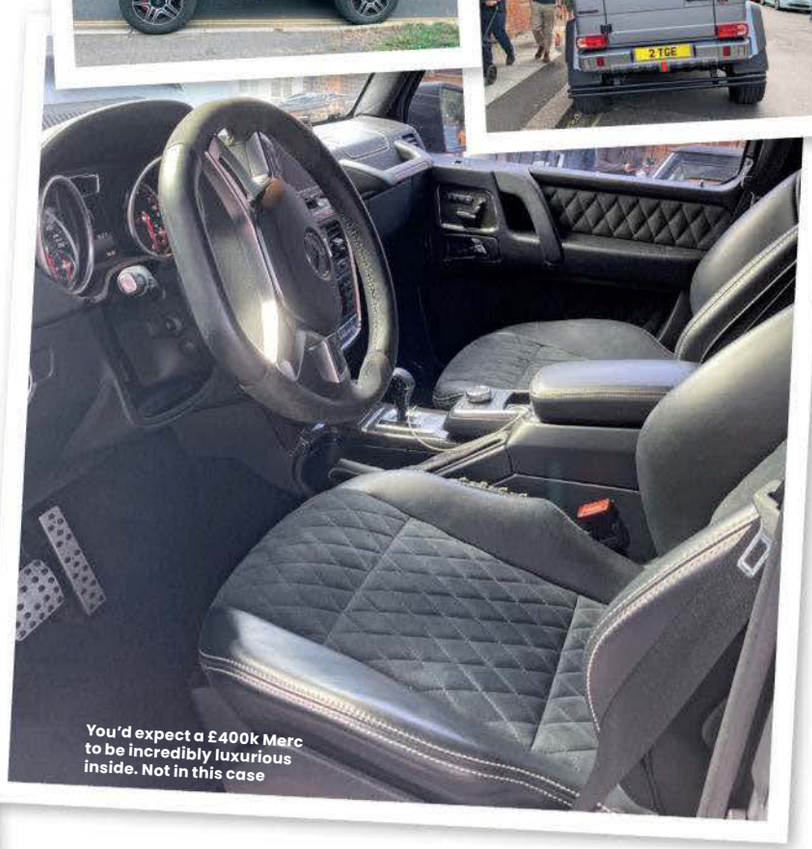
It was finished in the same shade of black as my own 2007 Alpina D3 Touring, so I simply had to have it, and after a short trip from Kent to Falmouth (via Lincolnshire for the Festival of the Unexceptional), it was mine.

Unfortunately, I can't justify running both Alpinas together (at least not while giving them the love they deserve), so one of them will have to depart sooner rather than later. At least my bank manager hopes so.

The question now is: will I fall head over heels in love with the Roadster S, forgive its impracticalities and keep it, or will I baulk at the price of putting it back to showroom condition and run to my 'sensible' diesel estate?

Subframes are rusty and paint is tired, but isn't the Roadster S cool?

If the army truck look of Tom's wild G-Wagen doesn't startle people, the V8 roar will



You'd expect a £400k Merc to be incredibly luxurious inside. Not in this case

Tom isn't exactly selling it, but then suddenly he remembers why he still owns it: "I've driven almost everything under the sun and there are very few cars I get in and which make me smile; this does. It's an experience and makes me smile every time. Of course, not everyone smiles when they see it. Some do, but some get cheesed off by it. It depends where I'm driving it. It towers over everything and can easily block a country lane. People who encounter it in the countryside are either terrified or angry."

Tom first came across the big Brabus when it was part of a private collection: "The owner was a rich man, and when he went for a drive in his Pagani Zonda, his security team followed behind him in this. When it came up for sale, I just had to buy it."

Tom reckons that it cost around £400,000 when new in 2016, but says he paid "less than £200,000" for it in 2022: "I don't regret buying it. Mercedes is hardly likely to make anything quite like it again."

The purchase price was one thing, but the running costs are quite another. "There is an economy mode but regardless it gets through petrol like there's a hole in the fuel tank," says Tom.

Servicing is expensive too. For example, the geared hubs require regular oil changes to prevent them falling apart. At least Tom doesn't have to travel far: his local Mercedes dealer has a Brabus department that looks after it.

In spite of its uncommunicative steering, awful ride, lane-filling dimensions and heroic thirst, Tom can't imagine himself ever parting with it: "It should last forever, so if I can afford to, I'll keep it."

JOHN EVANS

"It's atrocious to drive. The ride is horrendous and the steering doesn't really do anything"

along. Instead, the suspension is coil-sprung and is horrendous; you feel pretty much every bump. It's very uncomfortable. There is a Comfort mode and a Sport mode, but I can't for the life of me detect any difference between them. Both feel awful."

Head to head

Brief: Find a nearly new car that will make money in the future

KC It seems we've had the same idea: celebrate the end of an era at a firm in the throes of wholesale change. Much as your £19k Ford appeals, though, I see infinitely greater enthusiasm in the future for sports cars than family cars – as evidenced by my Lotus costing more now than it did new, at £36k.

JA The lack of new Fiestas has sent nearly new prices soaring, and with the Focus now also going out of production, I reckon the same could apply here. I worry that with your Elise already above original list, you're buying at a high peak. Although I will admit that your car is way cooler than mine.

KC I reckon your Focus will be a banger by 2030, because EVs will be objectively better family cars by then but I can't see an EV ever coming close to replicating the supercharged whooshing or twinkle-toed dancing of my Elise.

JA Yeah, you won't get much whooshing from a 1.0-litre Focus – but you will get great fuel economy and a family car that drives really well. And as long as I spot the price peak coming, I can cash in and put it towards an EV. Remember, this is about making money in the future: I worry that you will never want to sell that Lotus.

KC Damn it, you're almost certainly right. I wouldn't last five minutes on the trading floor...

KRIS CULMER

2020 LOTUS ELISE SPORT 220

vs

JAMES ATTWOOD

2024 FORD FOCUS 1.0 ECOBOOST MHEV ST-LINE

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

LAND ROVER DEFENDER 90 P525 CARPATHIAN EDITION
2022, 25,000 miles, £75,991
With a 5.0-litre 518bhp V8, this Defender would trounce Tom's Brabus G (left) over a quarter mile. Its short overhangs and extensive array of off-roading systems make it a fine go-anywhere vehicle too.

PORSCHE BOXSTER 3.2 S
2006, 78,000 miles, £13,000
This drop-top looks great value – one upside to summer ending. Its dark blue and tan leather combo sets it apart and it has a full history with a Porsche specialist. Its IMS and RMS bearings, notorious 987 weak spots, have been replaced too.

VW TOUAREG 5.0 TDI V10
2007, 188,000 miles, £2190
You will need the courage of an Isle of Man TT rider to buy a super-rare, V10 diesel Touareg. This one has moonshot mileage but is said to have been well maintained. Still, battery issues are common and if the turbos go, it's an engine-out job...

MERCEDES-BENZ SLK 55 AMG
2008, 88,000 miles, £17,995
Stuffing a 5.4-litre V8 into this diminutive sports car was a wise move by AMG. Punchy, agile and with a sleek folding roof, the SLK 55 makes 355bhp, 55bhp more than Alex's Alpina Z4 (left). This example looks immaculate, having been well cared for.

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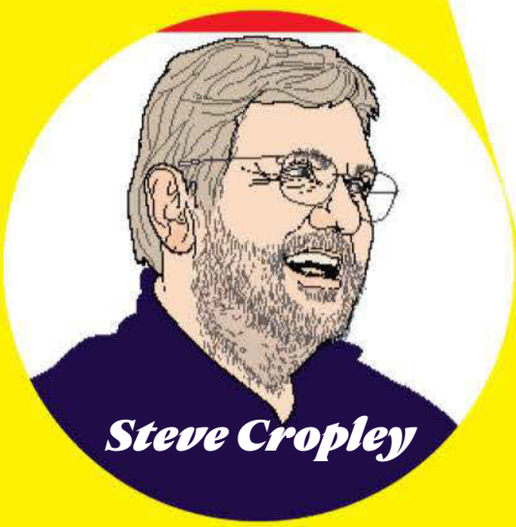

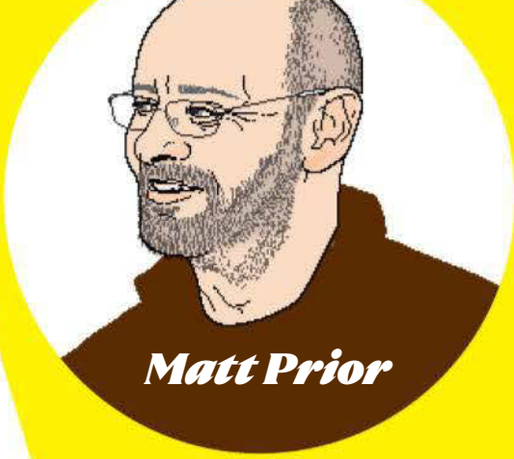

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

Smart was brainchild of Swatch CEO Hayek

Mercedes showed it was serious about Swatch car with 1994's Eco concepts

The difficult birth of the original Smart car

Smart recently confirmed that it is creating a new miniature two-seater – the unique proposition for which the brand was invented three decades ago – several years after foraying into electric SUVs.

The brand had some difficulty in building a business case for the #2 – but even so, its progress through the pipeline has been a lot smoother than that of the original City Coupé.

Autocar first reported on the project in February 1990, and the next summer its instigator, Nicolas Hayek, did a deal with Volkswagen.

The Lebanese-born 63-year-old, who we described as "a rumpled, cigar-chomping management consultant", was well known as the driving force behind Swatch. Having overseen the liquidation of two Swiss watchmakers engulfed by new competition such as Casio, from 1985 he drastically reduced the number of parts, almost fully automated the production process and took a bold, creative approach to marketing, and by 1990 Swiss watches were outselling Japanese ones by a factor of three.

Hayek described his Swatchmobile to us as a small electric car that could carry "two people and two cases of beer" for a price of £3570 (that's £8280 today).

"I don't know cars, just like I didn't know watches," he said. "I am just a fat old man who has kept his fantasy as it was when I was six years old. What makes me tick is starting something new, building something, changing something.

"I have more than enough money; it would be a pleasure to contribute to something good, something that will fight against the decadence of this civilisation."

He wasn't alone in his thinking: General Motors, Volkswagen, BMW, Nissan and several start-ups were at the time also endeavouring to bring EVs out of sci-fi and onto our roads.

"It's got to be a real car, not one of these toy electric things they have now," continued Hayek. "That's why we're putting electrical engineers in charge of the project instead of automotive engineers."

Swatchmobile, here seen testing, was canned by VW...

...so Swatch got on board with Merc project

We first spied the Swatchmobile testing as 1993 dawned – by which point its launch had already been delayed by two years to 1997. Battery technology hadn't advanced as much as expected, making a short range and a high price inevitable. But "Hayek's goal was to sell the chic Swatch car so cheaply that it becomes both classless and trendy", forcing a change to a hybrid system featuring a 250cc four-stroke petrol engine and a lead-acid battery.

Hayek planned to "offer an extended range of bright body colours and bodystyles using plastic body panels; a revolutionary system of removable paint films will permit owners to change the colour of the Swatch to suit their mood".

Although Volkswagen was backing the project, the car had largely been developed by Swatch in Biel, with help from the local engineering college.

Still, this was a tough time for the car maker, as losses mounted and production plummeted. And so when Ferdinand Piëch became big boss, he slashed investment and fully prioritised Wolfsburg's own hybrid city car, the ill-fated Chico.

"Our own car seemed a much better proposition," Piëch later recalled. "For me, [the Swatch] was an elephant's roller skate – not even a practical bubble car."

It seemed Hayek's fantasy was in tatters – until a saviour emerged in the form of Mercedes-Benz, whose management had been shaken into changing its conservative culture.

Mercedes designers were already working on a similar idea, and in early 1994 this was presented in the form of twin electric concept cars, coinciding with the announcement of a Mercedes-Swatch joint venture named Micro Compact Car (MCC).

A year on, we saw an all-new car testing. Engineered in Renningen by a small team of 166 – average age 34 – it used two-cylinder petrol and diesel engines and was built to the 'sandwich principle' of the new A-Class to ensure crash safety. Diesel hybrid and hub-motored electric versions were planned for later.

Then in May 1995 came a new name: Smart. S for Swatch, M for Mercedes and ART for art's sake.

Furthermore, a 'revolutionary' factory with Smart's 30 suppliers on site would be built in Hambach, France, for £305m (£533m today).

Hayek's fantasy – or Mercedes' equivalent of it – finally manifested in May 1997. "The future of mobility will be the Smart," MCC chairman Jürgen Hubbert predicted. Maybe this time he will be proven right.

KRIS CULMER

If you want to get lost in the archive...
Scan the QR code to read our original MCC Smart road test of 1999.

MERCEDES-BENZ ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

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Autocar's history of empirical road testing is the longest in the world. For more than a century, we have been verifying, scrutinising, describing and illustrating new cars in unparalleled detail. Driving impressions have always been a key part of this, around which the empirical tests have changed.

In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

Our tests are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car – and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⭐ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⭐ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⭐ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⭐ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⭐ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

ABARTH

500 Esseesse ★★★★☆ — 25.3.09
Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-

500e Turismo ★★★⭐☆ — 9.8.23
A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
6.9	6.4	1395	-	142

595 Competizione ★★★⭐☆ — 26.2.14
Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★⭐ — 29.3.17
Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-

Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★⭐☆ — 3.1.18
Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-

Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★⭐☆ — 9.1.19
A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-

Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆ — 28.6.23
Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

A110 Première Edition ★★★★★ — 16.5.18
Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-

A110 Légende GT ★★★★⭐ — 9.3.22
The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-

A110 R ★★★⭐☆ — 15.11.23
Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

Atom 4 ★★★★★ — 9.10.19
Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

Vantage ★★★★⭐ — 18.9.24
Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-

DBS Superleggera ★★★★★ — 21.11.18
Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-

Vanquish ★★★★⭐ — 26.3.25
Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-

DBX 707 ★★★★☆ — 30.11.22
A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★⭐☆ — 2.10.19
Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-

S3 Sportback ★★★⭐☆ — 18.11.20
Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-

RS3 Sportback Carbon Vorsprung ★★★★☆ — 9.7.25
Uber-A3 refuses to be defined just by its truly special five-cylinder engine.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.6	3.3	1619	34.1	-

S5 Launch Edition ★★★★☆ — 15.1.25
Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-

A6 E-Hybrid Launch Edition Quattro ★★★☆☆ — 1.10.25
Big executive saloon is spec-dependent – and misses its marks here.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5.8	5.2	2197	40.0	52

S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition ★★★★☆ — 16.4.25
Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256

RS6 Avant GT ★★★★☆ — 5.2.25
Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-

A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★☆☆ — 11.7.18
Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-

A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★☆☆ — 17.6.20
Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
-	-	2330	-	-

E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★⭐ — 26.6.19
A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5.4	4.2	2569	-	218

E-tron S Quattro ★★★⭐☆ — 2.6.21
A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
4.2	3.6	2643	-	-

Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★⭐☆ — 9.11.16
Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
8.1	8.2	1316	-	-

SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆ — 20.3.19
More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-

Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★⭐☆ — 7.7.21
Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
8.1	7.8	2112	-	-

Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line ★★★⭐☆ — 14.5.25
Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-

Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★⭐☆ — 2.10.24
EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5.3	4.3	-	2.8	247

Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ — 12.8.15
Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
6.2	6.2	2245	-	-

SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★⭐ — 26.10.16
A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-

Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆ — 26.9.18
Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-

R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆ — 30.12.15
Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.1	2.6	1730	-	-

S E-tron GT ★★★★☆ — 2.4.25
Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262

BENTLEY

Bentayga W12 ★★★★⭐ — 18.5.16
Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
4.9	4.4	2440	-	-

Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆ — 24.4.24
Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-

Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆ — 22.12.21
Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-

Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★⭐ — 19.4.23
Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-

Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition ★★★★☆ — 16.4.25
Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47

Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⭐ — 17.8.22
Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.

0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range

Flying Spur Speed First Edition
★★★★☆ 21.5.25
Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.
3.2 | 2.7 | 2750 | 26.7 | 44

BMW

120 M Sport ★★★½☆ 31.12.24
Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.
7.3 | 6.8 | 1489 | 45.8 | -

218i M Sport Gran Coupé
★★★☆☆ 8.4.20
Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.
8.8 | 8.4 | 1375 | 58.2 | -

220i M Sport Coupé ★★★★☆ 1.6.22
A good coupé rather than a great sports car.
7.3 | 7.3 | 1546 | 46.8 | -

M2 Coupé Manual ★★★★½ 12.7.23
Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.
4.5 | 3.8 | 1687 | 32.1 | -

320d M Sport Auto ★★★★★ 15.5.19
BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.
6.9 | 6.8 | 1639 | 63.3 | -

330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring ★★★★½ 15.1.20
An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.
5.5 | 5.2 | 1922 | 52.6 | -

330e M Sport ★★★★½ 1.7.20
Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.
- | - | 1740 | - | -

M440i xDrive ★★★★☆ 6.1.21
A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.
4.1 | 3.7 | 1775 | 44.0 | -

M4 Competition ★★★★½ 21.4.21
A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.
3.9 | 2.9 | 1800 | 32.7 | -

M4 CS ★★★★☆ 23.4.25
Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.
2.9 | 2.5 | 1747 | 32.4 | -

i4 M50 ★★★★☆ 19.1.22
Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.
4.1 | 3.2 | 2248 | - | 186

M4 CSL ★★★★☆ 16.11.22
A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.
3.6 | 2.7 | 1625 | 31.1 | -

M5 ★★★½☆ 29.1.25
A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.
3.5 | 2.8 | 2373 | 27.3 | 35

i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro ★★★½☆ 29.11.23
Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.
5.4 | 4.4 | 2213 | - | 235

550e xDrive M Sport Pro
★★★★☆ 3.4.24
Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.
4.4 | 3.5 | 2232 | 40.1 | 47

i7 xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★½ 15.2.23
It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.
4.5 | 3.4 | 2758 | - | 264

840d xDrive ★★★★☆ 16.1.19
A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.
5.0 | 4.6 | 1901 | 49.2 | -

M8 Competition Convertible
★★★½☆ 5.2.20
Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.
3.3 | 2.7 | 2020 | 31.6 | -

M8 Competition ★★★½☆ 3.6.20
Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.
- | - | 1960 | - | -

X1 xDrive23i M Sport ★★★½☆ 25.1.23
A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.
6.4 | 6.0 | 1800 | 45.6 | -

X4 M Competition ★★★☆☆ 13.11.19
Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.
4.0 | 3.3 | 2028 | 29.0 | -

X5 xDrive30d M Sport ★★★★☆ 2.1.19
Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.
6.6 | 6.6 | 2279 | 43.1 | -

X6 M Competition ★★★☆☆ 20.3.24
Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.
3.5 | 3.1 | 2442 | 29.3 | -

X7 M60i xDrive ★★★★☆ 29.3.23
Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.
4.2 | 3.7 | 2600 | 28.9 | -

iX xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★½ 9.7.25
Took the luxury EV to new heights in 2022 and nobody has caught up yet. Still great.
4.2 | 3.3 | 2637 | 2.7 | 314

Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack
★★★★☆ 21.8.24
Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.
5.7 | 5.9 | 1561 | 36.9 | -

BMW ALPINA

B3 GT Touring ★★★★½ 15.1.25
Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.
3.3 | 2.7 | 1910 | 29.4 | -

B8 Gran Coupé ★★★★☆ 22.9.21
Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.
3.5 | 2.8 | 2100 | - | -

BYD

Dolphin Surf Boost ★★★★☆ 6.8.25
Efficient, well packaged and well priced. Its minor transgressions are forgivable.
12.0 | 13.0 | 1385 | 3.9 | 173

Atto 3 Design ★★★☆☆ 31.5.23
Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.
7.0 | 6.2 | 1787 | - | 201

Seal Design ★★★½☆ 17.1.24
Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.
5.8 | 4.7 | 2116 | - | 279

CATERHAM

Seven 160 ★★★★☆ 20.11.13
Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.
8.4 | 8.7 | 510 | 44.8 | -

Seven 620S ★★★★½ 9.3.16
Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.
3.8 | 4.2 | 650 | 29.5 | -

Seven 420 Cup ★★★★½ 31.8.22
Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.
4.2 | 3.4 | 560 | 35.3 | -

CHEVROLET

Corvette 3LT ★★★★☆ 22.6.22
Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.
3.9 | 3.2 | 1679 | 32.9 | -

Corvette Z06 3LZ ★★★★☆ 16.8.23
Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.
3.1 | 2.4 | 1670 | 26.1 | -

CITROEN

Ami Colour ★★½☆☆ 11.1.23
Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.
- | - | 471 | - | 39

ë-C3 Max ★★★½☆ 30.4.25
Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.
10.7 | 10.3 | 1479 | 2.8 | -

C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair
★★★½☆ 7.3.18
Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.
11.5 | 10.7 | 1159 | 39.5 | -

C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto
★★★☆☆ 26.5.21
Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.
9.5 | 9.2 | 1320 | 56.4 | -

ë-C4 X Shine ★★★½☆ 3.5.23
EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.
9.7 | 8.8 | 1623 | - | 162

C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus
★★★½☆ 13.2.19
Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.
9.0 | 8.5 | 1540 | 47.8 | -

C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus
★★★★☆ 28.9.22
Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.
7.8 | 7.1 | 1502 | 47.8 | -

CUPRA

Born 204PS 58kWh V3 ★★★½☆ 6.7.22
As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.
6.7 | 6.2 | 1794 | - | 220

Born VZ First Edition ★★★★☆ 9.10.24
An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.
5.4 | 4.2 | 1996 | 3.5 | 269

Leon Estate 310PS VZ3 ★★★★☆ 8.9.21
Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.
4.9 | 4.3 | 1707 | 40.1 | -

Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2 ★★★★☆ 27.7.22
Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.
5.9 | 4.7 | 1468 | 43.4 | -

Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG ★★★½☆ 23.1.19
Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.
4.9 | 4.4 | 1615 | 36.7 | -

Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG
★★★★½ 3.2.21
Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.
5.1 | 4.3 | 1583 | 36.4 | -

Terramar 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2
★★★★☆ 18.6.25
Hottish cousin of the Volkswagen Tiguan is likeable but a bit too sensible.
5.6 | 5.1 | 1737 | 35.0 | -

Tavascan V1 ★★★☆☆ 5.2.25
Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.
6.0 | 5.0 | 2129 | 3.2 | 246

DACIA

Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige
★★★★☆ 28.4.21
Compromised in surprisingly few areas.
11.9 | 11.9 | 1096 | 54.1 | -

Jogger TCe 110 Comfort ★★★★½ 20.4.22
Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.
11.0 | 11.0 | 1267 | 48.5 | -

Duster Hybrid 140 Journey
★★★★½ 27.11.24
Notably improved yet barely any pricier.
9.7 | 8.7 | 1413 | 40.2 | -

Bigster Hybrid 155 Journey
★★★★☆ 11.6.25
Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature.
8.9 | 7.8 | - | 47.5 | -

DS

3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige
★★★☆☆ 10.7.19
No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.
8.8 | 8.3 | 1205 | 48.6 | -

4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+
★★★½☆ 29.6.22
High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.
7.4 | 6.0 | 1706 | 44.7 | 26

7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige
★★★½☆ 19.9.18
DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.
8.6 | 7.0 | 1616 | 44.6 | -

7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première
★★★½☆ 26.4.23
More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.
5.7 | 4.6 | 1956 | 36.6 | 29

9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus
★★★½☆ 2.2.22
Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.
8.6 | 7.1 | 1886 | 44.7 | 20

FERRARI

296 GTB ★★★★★ 21.12.22
Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.
2.7 | 1.9 | 1648 | 37.8 | 15

SF90 Stradale ★★★★☆ 3.11.21
Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.
2.5 | 1.8 | 1698 | 24.4 | 16

FIAT

500 Twinair Lounge ★★★½☆ 24.11.10
Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.
11.7 | 13.0 | 1070 | 42.1 | -

500e 42kWh Icon ★★★★☆ 26.1.22
More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.
8.1 | 7.7 | 1365 | - | 142

0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range

600e La Prima ★★★½☆ 27.3.24
Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.
8.8 | 7.7 | 1587 | - | 173

FORD

Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X ★★★★½ 20.2.19
Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.
8.9 | 7.8 | 1417 | 43.8 | -

Focus ST ★★★★☆ 11.9.19
Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.
6.1 | 4.9 | 1433 | 40.7 | -

Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium ★★★★½ 25.3.20
The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.
10.0 | 9.6 | 1260 | 50.0 | -

Puma Gen-E Select ★★★★☆ 4.6.25
Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class.
7.2 | 7.2 | - | 3.4 | 179

Puma ST ★★★★☆ 24.3.21
Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.
7.2 | 6.2 | 1301 | 41.5 | -

Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★½☆ 23.10.24
Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.
5.8 | 4.8 | 2067 | 2.9 | 262

Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★½☆ 24.6.20
Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.
- | - | 1844 | - | -

Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD ★★★★☆ 23.6.21
Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.
6.8 | 5.6 | 2130 | - | -

Mustang Mach-E GT AWD ★★★☆☆ 27.4.22
Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.
4.2 | 3.5 | 2298 | - | -

Mustang Dark Horse ★★★½☆ 20.11.24
Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.
4.5 | 3.5 | 1853 | 26.1 | -

Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium ★★★½☆ 10.7.24
Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.
10.8 | 10.6 | 1426 | 47.4 | -

Tourneo Connect 1.5 Ecoboost PHEV Titanium ★★★½☆ 2.7.25
PHEV power is a smart choice in this versatile, though expensive, utility MPV.
9.7 | 9.5 | 1876 | 40.3 | 64

Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★☆ 8.5.24
Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.
12.1 | 11.8 | 1971 | 38.8 | -

Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak ★★★★½ 14.6.23
Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.
9.8 | 9.9 | 2348 | 36.6 | -

GENESIS

G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★½☆ 10.11.21
Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.
7.2 | 6.7 | 1751 | 60.4 | -

Electrified G80 ★★★½☆ 12.10.22
Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.
4.4 | 4.0 | 2349 | - | 272

GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★☆ 24.8.22
Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.
3.8 | 3.1 | 2192 | - | 220

GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater ★★★½☆ 15.9.21
Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.
6.7 | 6.6 | 2217 | 45.0 | -

GWM

Ora Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition ★★½☆☆ 1.2.23
Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.
7.7 | 7.2 | 1580 | - | 154

HONDA

E Advance ★★★½☆ 26.8.20
More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.
7.9 | - | 1535 | - | 110

Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX ★★★½☆ 7.10.20
Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.
9.6 | 10.0 | 1248 | 57.0 | -

Civic Type R ★★★★☆ 10.9.25
Road-legal touring car vibe perfected. Sensational – if a little serious.
5.4 | 4.5 | 1417 | 37.4 | -

HR-V e:HEV Advance Style ★★★½☆ 24.11.21
Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.
9.2 | 9.3 | 1397 | 43.2 | -

e:Ny1 Advance ★★★☆☆ 1.11.23
EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.
8.6 | 6.9 | 1756 | - | 211

HYUNDAI

i10 1.2 MPi Premium ★★★★☆ 15.4.20
Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.
12.3 | 12.9 | 999 | 52.5 | -

Inster 49kWh Long Range 02 ★★★½☆ 24.9.25
Dinky looks but a surprisingly grown-up and versatile ownership experience.
9.6 | 8.8 | - | 3.3 | 179

i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect ★★★½☆ 24.2.21
Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.
9.7 | 10.1 | 1065 | 63.5 | -

i20 N ★★★★½ 25.8.21
N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.
6.1 | 5.4 | 1231 | 50.6 | -

Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★½☆ 7.6.23
Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.
7.2 | 6.2 | 2006 | - | 272

Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★☆ 6.9.23
Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.
10.4 | 10.3 | 1352 | 50.4 | -

Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium ★★★★☆ 17.3.21
Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.
7.6 | 6.2 | 1612 | 47.7 | -

Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★ 7.8.24
A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.
3.5 | 2.7 | 2221 | - | 224

Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium ★★★★☆ 16.10.24
A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.
7.9 | 7.5 | 2007 | 32.9 | -

Nexo ★★★½☆ 12.6.19
Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.
9.6 | 9.7 | 1852 | - | -

INEOS

Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster ★★★½☆ 20.9.23
Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.
8.0 | 8.1 | 2682 | 20.9 | -

JAECOO

7 SHS 2WD Luxury ★★½☆☆ 9.4.25
Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.
7.3 | 6.4 | 1814 | 35.0 | 41

JAGUAR

XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD ★★★½☆ 17.4.19
Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.
6.6 | 6.2 | 1727 | 36.8 | -

E-Pace D180 AWD SE ★★★½☆ 11.4.18
Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.
9.9 | 10.5 | 1768 | 49.2 | -

I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★½ 12.9.18
Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.
4.5 | 3.5 | 2236 | - | -

F-Pace SVR ★★★★½ 24.7.19
Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.
4.1 | 3.5 | 2070 | 29.4 | -

F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★½ 1.12.21
Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.
5.1 | 4.6 | 2264 | - | 24

F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé ★★★★☆ 29.4.20
The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.
- | - | 1743 | - | -

JEEP

Avenger Electric Summit ★★★½☆ 24.1.24
Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.
8.3 | 6.9 | 1601 | - | 172

Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★½☆ 3.10.18
Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.
11.0 | 11.5 | 1540 | 44.8 | -

Compass 4xe S ★★★☆☆ 16.2.22
Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.
6.4 | 5.7 | 1872 | 46.9 | 22

Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★½☆ 28.10.15
Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.
10.8 | 11.2 | 1502 | 52.6 | -

Renegade 4xe Trailhawk ★★★½☆ 30.6.21
Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.
6.7 | 5.6 | 1816 | 39.4 | 21

Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland ★★★★☆ 10.4.19
Off-road icon is now more competent on it.
9.0 | 9.1 | 2122 | 37.6 | -

KGM

Tivoli XLV ELX Auto ★★★½☆ 14.9.16
Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.
12.0 | 12.6 | 1469 | - | -

Torres 1.5T K40 AWD ★★½☆☆ 4.6.25
Cheerful enough, although not as cheap or capable as we had hoped.
11.3 | 12.0 | 1661 | 35.0 | -

KIA

Picanto 1.0 MPI 2 ★★★½☆ 11.9.24
No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.
13.4 | 13.9 | 985 | 51.4 | -

Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2 ★★★★☆ 29.8.18
Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.
9.9 | 9.6 | 1411 | 70.3 | -

Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S ★★★½☆ 27.2.19
Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.
9.5 | 8.9 | 1475 | 42.6 | -

TOP 3

BEST ELECTRIC CARS

1 Kia EV3

2 Hyundai Ioniq 5 N

3 Cupra Born

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1977 CITROEN CX 2400 GTi

After three years on sale, DS successor gets a bigger engine. "Perfectly capable of being cruised all day long flat out, carrying its passengers in near-perfect comfort. In a world of standardisation, the GTi comes as a great gust of fresh air to blow away the cobwebs."

Price £6466
Engine 4 cyls in line, 2347cc, petrol
Power 128bhp at 4800rpm
Torque 145lb ft at 3600rpm
Weight 1528kg
0-60mph 10.1sec
0-100mph 34.4sec
Top speed 118mph
Economy 21.6mpg

1936 ROLLS-ROYCE PHANTOM III

New iteration of luxury brand's flagship arrives with twice the cylinder count. "Somewhere is an ultimate in the highest expression of road travel comfort and performance, and this is beyond question the nearest approach to it as yet."

Price £2600 (with Pullman limo body)
Engine V12, 7340cc, petrol
Power 165bhp at 3500rpm (est)
Torque na
Weight 2630kg
0-30mph 5.5sec
0-60mph 16.8sec
Top speed 92mph
Economy 10mpg

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*For three weeks from publication date

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition ★★★½☆ 20.11.19 Looks good and drives well yet lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban ★★★½☆ 5.7.23 Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3 ★★★★☆ 7.9.22 A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line ★★★★☆ 31.12.24 New-era Niro is rationally compelling although it's not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S ★★★½☆ 15.6.22 Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S ★★★★☆ 9.10.24 Not the outstanding EV it once was yet still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT ★★★½☆ 4.10.23 Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2 ★★★½☆ 20.1.21 Lacks polish, although its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S ★★★★☆ 31.1.24 Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220
LAMBORGHINI					
Huracán Performante ★★★★½ 11.10.17 Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD ★★★★½ 20.5.20 Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto ★★★★½ 4.12.24 New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus ★★★★☆ 3.7.19 Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-
LAND ROVER					
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★½ 10.2.21 A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE ★★★★☆ 8.1.20 Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury ★★★★½ 12.4.17 A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE ★★★½☆ 30.8.17 Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X ★★★★½ 13.5.20 World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1 ★★★★½ 30.4.25 Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE ★★★★½ 2.11.22 Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One ★★★½☆ 28.8.24 More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE ★★★★½ 13.7.22 A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography ★★★★☆ 9.4.25 A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44
LEXUS					
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design ★★★½☆ 29.5.24 Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack ★★★★☆ 16.3.22 Interesting, refined and efficient, although not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport ★★★½☆ 22.3.23 Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi ★★★½☆ 6.2.19 Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition ★★★½☆ 6.11.24 Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi ★★★☆☆ 7.2.24 MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-
LOTUS					
Emira V6 First Edition ★★★★½ 2.4.25 The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	-
Emeya 600 GT ★★★★☆ 28.5.25 A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R ★★★½☆ 24.7.24 There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216
Evija ★★★★☆ 30.7.25 Mind-blowingly fast and intense, with some defining digital inhibitions.	2.8	1.9	1906	2.2	122
MASERATI					
Grecale Trofeo ★★★½☆ 18.10.23 A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante S Granlusso ★★★½☆ 8.5.19 Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo ★★★½☆ 11.9.24 An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore ★★★½☆ 26.2.25 Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo ★★★★☆ 16.10.24 Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-
MAZDA					
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav ★★★★☆ 22.4.15 The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport ★★★★☆ 6.11.19 Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech ★★★½☆ 10.3.21 Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line ★★★★☆ 19.2.25 Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav ★★★★☆ 28.6.17 Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line ★★★½☆ 10.5.23 Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav ★★★★½ 2.9.15 An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-
McLAREN					
720S ★★★★★ 24.5.17 Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-
750S ★★★★☆ 19.6.24 McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura ★★★★½ 19.10.22 Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17

0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range

Artura Spider ★★★★½ 6.11.24
Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.
3.1 | 2.2 | 1618 | 27.2 | 17

GT ★★★½☆ 27.1.21
Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.
3.3 | 2.3 | 1580 | 34.2

MERCEDES-AMG

A45 S 4Matic+ Plus ★★★★½ 4.3.20
AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.
4.1 | 3.3 | 1661 | 41.5 | -

C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate ★★★☆☆ 31.7.24
Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.
3.3 | 2.8 | 2217 | 27.1 | 7.1

CLE 53 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus ★★★★☆ 20.8.25
Appealing GT leaves something on the table.
3.9 | 3.5 | 2012 | 26.9 | -

GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé ★★★★½ 13.3.19
AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.
3.3 | 2.7 | 2135 | 30.1 | -

GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé ★★★½☆ 21.6.23
Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.
2.9 | 2.5 | 2339 | 23.9 | 6

EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition ★★★★☆ 8.6.22
Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.
3.6 | 2.8 | 2673 | - | 259

S63 E Performance Night Edition ★★★★☆ 2.10.24
Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.
3.5 | 2.7 | 2666 | 26.1 | -

GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 14.10.20
Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.
5.4 | 4.9 | 2471 | 29.4 | -

SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 26.7.23
Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.
3.5 | 2.8 | 1939 | 26.2 | -

GT 43 Premium Coupé ★★★★☆ 3.9.25
Less grunt with more grin for less outlay – but a rear-driven GT 55 would be better still.
4.5 | 3.7 | - | 36.6 | -

GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé ★★★½☆ 14.8.24
Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.
3.1 | 2.7 | 1972 | 30.7 | -

MERCEDES-BENZ

A200 AMG Line Executive ★★★★☆ 24.5.23
Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.
7.8 | 7.3 | 1396 | 59.3 | -

A250e AMG Line Premium ★★★☆☆ 5.8.20
Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.
6.7 | 5.4 | 1665 | 57.8 | -

B180 Sport ★★★★☆ 3.4.19
In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.
8.4 | 8.3 | 1405 | 51.3 | -

C300e AMG Line ★★★★½ 4.5.22
Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.
5.8 | 5.1 | 2005 | 49.0 | 48

E220d AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★☆ 3.1.24
An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.
7.2 | 5.9 | 1917 | 65.8 | -

E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus ★★★★½ 19.3.25
Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.
4.9 | 4.3 | 2167 | 46.1 | -

EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 4.1.23
Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.
6.0 | 5.5 | 2386 | - | 262

EQS 450+ Business Class ★★★★☆ 7.5.25
Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.
5.9 | 4.9 | 2608 | 2.6 | 248

EQS 450 Business Class SUV ★★★½☆ 6.3.24
Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.
5.5 | 5.2 | 2899 | - | 265

S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive ★★★★½ 6.4.22
Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.
5.2 | 4.2 | 2530 | 37.0 | 45

EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★☆☆ 17.11.21
Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.
8.4 | 7.6 | 2030 | - | 200

GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★½☆ 16.9.20
Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.
7.4 | 7.1 | 1810 | 55.4 | -

EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★½☆ 18.5.22
A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.
7.7 | 6.8 | 2235 | - | -

GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 13.9.23
Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.
6.5 | 6.0 | 1929 | 41.2 | -

GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★½☆ 12.2.20
Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.
6.5 | 6.0 | 2634 | 38.2 | -

G350d AMG Line ★★★★☆ 17.7.19
Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.
7.5 | 7.2 | 2451 | 31.3 | -

G500 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★☆ 25.9.24
Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.
5.1 | 4.5 | - | 30.7 | -

G580 with EQ Technology ★★★½☆ 17.9.25
Electric G-Class has no true raison d'être but is still strangely compelling.
4.5 | 3.9 | 3140 | 1.6 | 209

CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé ★★★★☆ 13.11.24
Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.
6.1 | 5.5 | 2122 | 37.1 | 49

MG

3 Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★½☆ 12.6.24
No bad vices but lacks a final layer of polish.
6.8 | 6.2 | 1311 | 47.9 | -

4 EV Long Range SE ★★★★☆ 5.4.23
Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.
7.1 | 6.1 | 1692 | - | 185

S5 EV Long Range Trophy ★★★★☆ 23.7.25
It outstrips expectations for the money, except on range.
6.0 | 5.1 | 1723 | 3.3 | 217

ZS Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★☆☆ 22.1.25
Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.
7.6 | 6.6 | 1422 | 41.5 | -

MINI

John Cooper Works ★★★★☆ 14.5.25
A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.
5.8 | 4.5 | 1363 | 42.0 | -

Countryman C Exclusive ★★★½☆ 17.4.24
Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.
8.7 | 7.7 | 1618 | 46.9 | -

Aceman SE Exclusive ★★★½☆ 8.1.25
Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.
6.8 | 5.7 | 1756 | 3.1 | 162

MORGAN

Plus Four ★★★½☆ 12.8.20
Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.
5.1 | 4.3 | 1013 | 54.0 | -

Supersport ★★★★☆ 6.8.25
Quite plainly the most polished Morgan to date yet still charismatic.
3.8 | 3.1 | 1180 | 44.2 | -

Super 3 ★★★★½ 9.11.22
Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.
6.9 | 5.9 | 644 | 43.5 | -

NISSAN

Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna ★★★½☆ 29.1.20
Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.
11.9 | 11.8 | 1256 | 46.0 | -

Qashqai E-Power Tekna+ ★★★★☆ 8.10.25
Hybrid SUV takes big strides, not least on real-world efficiency.
7.6 | 6.1 | 1681 | 48.8 | -

Ariya 87kWh Evolve ★★★½☆ 26.10.22
Surprisingly traditional and luxurious although not wholly successful.
8.2 | 6.4 | 2109 | - | -

X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna ★★★★☆ 22.2.23
Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.
6.6 | 6.0 | 1947 | 33.8 | -

OMODA

5 1.6 TGDI Comfort ★★½☆☆ 20.11.24
Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.
7.4 | 6.3 | 1474 | 38.2 | -

PEUGEOT

e-208 Allure Premium ★★★★☆ 6.5.20
Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV
- | - | 1455 | - | -

308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT ★★★★☆ 25.5.22
A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.
9.5 | 9.2 | 1358 | 55.3 | -

408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8 ★★★★☆ 11.10.23
Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.
8.2 | 7.3 | 1746 | 42.1 | 40

508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto ★★★★☆ 24.10.18
Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.
8.8 | 8.5 | 1671 | 52.0 | -

508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8 ★★★★☆ 8.7.20
This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.
- | - | 1720 | - | -

508 SW Hybrid4 PSE ★★★★☆ 5.5.21
Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.
5.7 | 4.7 | 1892 | 44.0 | -

TOP 3

BEST DIESEL COMPANY CARS

1 Skoda Superb

2 Volkswagen Golf

3 Mazda CX-60

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

e-2008 GT Line ★★★½☆ 30.9.20
Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.
9.5 8.9 1638 - -

e-3008 73kWh Allure ★★★½☆ 4.8.24
Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.
8.5 7.1 2132 - 219

5008 Hybrid 136 GT ★★★☆☆ 12.2.25
Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.
9.9 9.4 1736 44.0 -

POLESTAR

2 BST Edition 270 ★★★½☆ 12.4.23
A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.
4.5 3.4 2161 - 188

3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 12.2.25
Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.
4.6 3.8 2610 2.3 235

4 Long Range Single Motor ★★★☆☆ 24.9.25
Electric crossover is desirable but something of a missed opportunity.
6.8 5.5 2246 2.5 310

PORSCHE

718 Boxster ★★★★½ 8.6.16
Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.
5.4 4.3 1395 35.9 -

718 Cayman S ★★★★½ 10.8.16
Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.
4.8 3.9 1430 - -

718 Cayman GT4 RS ★★★★★ 14.9.22
A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.
3.9 3.0 1444 27.1 -

911 Carrera S ★★★★½ 3.9.25
Supercar quick but gloriously rounded with it.
3.0 2.5 1600 34.5 -

911 Carrera T ★★★★☆ 30.8.23
Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.
4.9 3.8 1456 39.1 -

911 Carrera GTS ★★★★½ 5.3.25
Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.
2.8 2.6 1607 34.3 -

911 Turbo S ★★★★½ 10.8.22
Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.
2.5 2.0 1640 36.3 -

911 GT3 PDK ★★★★½ 11.8.21
Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.
3.4 2.7 1430 29.2 -

911 GT3 RS ★★★★½ 22.11.23
Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.
3.2 2.5 1476 26.7 -

911 Dakar ★★★★☆ 10.1.24
Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.
3.3 2.6 1660 36.0 -

911 S/T ★★★★★ 3.7.24
Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.
3.7 2.6 1408 30.9 -

Macan Electric ★★★★☆ 13.8.25
Well rounded in every sense and not without quietly executed driver appeal.
5.2 4.2 2262 3.0 219

Macan Turbo Electric ★★★½☆ 19.2.25
Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.
3.0 2.5 - 2.1 219

Cayenne S ★★★★½ 21.2.24
Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.
5.0 4.3 2256 28.8 -

Cayenne Turbo ★★★★☆ 5.9.18
As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.
3.9 3.4 2307 31.5 -

Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid ★★★½☆ 27.5.20
Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.
- - 2490 - -

Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé ★★★★☆ 20.7.22
Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.
3.1 2.7 2251 26.1 -

Panamera 4 E-Hybrid ★★★★☆ 22.1.25
Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.
3.8 2.4 2370 30.1 29

Taycan Turbo S ★★★★½ 30.10.24
Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.
2.6 1.9 2356 2.7 233

RENAULT

Clio TCe 100 Iconic ★★★★½ 27.11.19
Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.
11.6 10.9 1138 56.9 -

4 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic ★★★★☆ 16.7.25
Charismatic but grown-up, the reborn 4 is a real contender.
8.2 7.5 1493 3.3 182

5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five ★★★★½ 12.3.25
Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.
7.7 7.2 1461 3.1 166

Megane E-Tech Techno ★★★½☆ 23.11.22
Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.
6.9 5.4 1688 - 198

Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC ★★★½☆ 18.3.20
Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.
9.4 9.2 1363 53.1 -

Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition ★★★½☆ 13.10.21
Eminently sensible but unspectacular.
11.0 10.1 1365 58.3 -

Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range ★★★★☆ 26.6.24
The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.
8.1 6.3 1916 - 313

Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine ★★★½☆ 19.7.23
Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.
8.5 6.9 1696 43.5 -

ROLLS-ROYCE

Ghost Series II Black Badge ★★★★½ 25.6.25
Only flirts with sporting appeal, and gives up no Rolls accomplishments in doing so.
4.5 3.6 2576 25.8 -

Phantom ★★★★★ 4.4.18
The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.
5.5 4.4 2780 28.4 -

Spectre ★★★★½ 20.12.23
Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.
4.1 3.1 2935 - 245

Cullinan Black Badge ★★★★☆ 19.2.20
Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.
4.9 4.2 2739 23.6 -

SEAT

Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★½ 19.7.17
Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.
10.0 10.0 1047 55.6 -

Leon eHybrid FR ★★★½☆ 2.12.20
Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.
7.2 6.2 1558 46.3 26

Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★☆ 15.11.17
Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.
10.5 10.7 1149 40.9 -

Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG ★★★☆☆ 25.10.23
Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.
8.9 8.0 1396 44.4 -

SKODA

Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort ★★★★½ 9.2.22
Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.
9.9 9.7 1117 58.7 -

Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG ★★★½☆ 31.7.19
Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.
7.9 7.3 1200 52.9 -

Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG ★★★★☆ 2.9.20
Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.
8.4 8.7 1510 73.0 -

Octavia Estate vRS ★★★★☆ 29.1.25
A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.
5.9 4.8 - 37.6 -

Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate ★★★★★ 17.7.24
The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.
8.4 8.2 1673 68.7 -

Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout ★★★½☆ 30.1.19
Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.
8.9 9.6 1629 47.1 -

Elroq 85 Edition ★★★★½ 19.3.25
Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.
6.1 5.0 2085 3.5 246

Enyaq iV 80 Lounge ★★★★☆ 18.8.21
Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.
8.3 7.8 2098 - 262

SMART

#1 Premium ★★★½☆ 8.11.23
Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.
5.6 4.6 1861 - 229

#3 Premium ★★★½☆ 15.5.24
Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.
5.7 4.9 1832 - 205

SUBARU

Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring ★★★½☆ 28.2.24
Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.
10.4 10.4 1620 45.3 -

Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring ★★★½☆ 27.9.23
A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.
9.3 8.7 1690 42.8 -

Solterra AWD Touring ★★★☆☆ 15.3.23
A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.
6.7 6.2 2051 - 169

SUZUKI

Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT ★★★★½ 7.4.21
Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.
6.4 5.8 1966 44.4 48

TOP 3

FASTEST ROAD-LEGAL CARS

1 Koenigsegg Jesko Absolut

2 Yangwang U9 Xtreme

3 Bugatti Chiron Super Sport 300+

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range

TESLA

Model 3 Standard Range Plus ★★★★☆ 4.9.19
Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.
5.8 4.7 1633 - 156

Model 3 Long Range ★★★★☆ 14.2.24
Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.
4.4 3.4 1846 - 277

Model Y Long Range Rear-Wheel Drive ★★★★☆ 27.8.25
Evolution keeps Model Y nicely on the boil – for now.
5.7 4.3 1903 3.2 315

Model S P90D ★★★★½ 20.4.16
Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.
3.5 3.0 2220 - 214

Model S Plaid ★★★½☆ 2.8.23
Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.
2.4 1.7 2220 - 301

Model X 90D ★★★★☆ 15.2.17
High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.
5.2 4.2 2508 - 147

TOYOTA

Aygo X Limited Edition ★★★½☆ 11.5.22
A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.
15.6 16.5 974 58.7 -

Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design ★★★★☆ 23.9.20
Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.
9.2 8.8 1140 65.0 -

GR Yaris Circuit Pack ★★★★★ 3.3.21
Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.
5.2 5.0 1283 39.2 -

Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports ★★★★☆ 5.6.19
A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.
8.5 7.7 1537 52.6 -

Prius Plug-in Design ★★★★☆ 23.4.25
Better late than never for best Prius to date.
6.6 5.6 1542 56.1 46

bZ4X AWD Vision ★★★½☆ 18.1.23
A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.
6.4 5.9 2023 - 208

Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible ★★★★☆ 21.5.25
Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.
10.3 10.3 2503 30.7 -

Mirai Design Premium ★★★★☆ 16.6.21
Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.
8.7 8.3 1937 - -

GR Supra Pro ★★★★☆ 14.8.19
Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.
4.4 3.6 1495 39.0 -

Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport ★★★½☆ 1.3.23
Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.
10.0 9.5 2241 32.5 -

VAUXHALL

Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto ★★★½☆ 22.1.20
Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.
11.2 11.5 1171 51.8 -

Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line ★★★½☆ 5.10.22
Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.
9.9 9.2 1304 55.3 -

Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite ★★★☆☆ 7.6.17
Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.
9.8 10.3 1278 54.2 -

Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto ★★★½☆ 12.5.21
The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.
9.3 9.1 1238 48.6 -

Grandland Hybrid GS ★★★½☆ 27.8.25
Spacious, functional, efficient and good value, yet neither grand nor lovely.
9.8 9.3 1623 52.2 -

Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy ★★★½☆ 27.12.18
Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.
14.7 16.2 1552 60.1 -

VOLKSWAGEN

Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE ★★★★½ 31.1.18
Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.
10.7 11.2 1145 57.1 -

Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+ ★★★★☆ 1.8.18
A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.
6.7 5.9 1342 46.8 -

Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG ★★★★½ 22.7.20
Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.
8.3 7.8 1330 60.0 -

Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style ★★★★½ 23.10.24
New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.
7.2 6.1 1619 46.5 -

Golf GTI ★★★½☆ 25.9.24
'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.
5.3 4.4 - 47.2 -

Golf R ★★★★☆ 14.4.21
Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.
4.4 3.7 1520 43.9 -

ID 3 Pro Performance Life ★★★★☆ 31.3.21
Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.
7.0 6.5 1757 - 145

Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake ★★★½☆ 9.6.21
Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.
7.1 6.0 1783 52.5 -

ID 7 Pro Match ★★★★½ 13.3.24
Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.
6.1 5.1 2162 - 239

ID 7 GTX Tourer ★★★☆☆ 13.8.25
Sporty electric estate is appealing but not the product the GTX brand needs.
5.3 4.6 2353 2.9 241

T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG ★★★★½ 24.1.18
Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.
6.7 6.5 1534 37.5 -

T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG ★★½☆☆ 10.6.20
It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.
- - 1540 - -

Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line ★★★½☆ 22.5.24
Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.
9.4 9.2 1606 44.9 -

ID 4 GTX Max ★★★½☆ 27.10.21
GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.
6.2 5.6 2220 - 200

Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech ★★★½☆ 8.8.18
An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.
7.2 6.6 2292 41.6 -

Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance ★★★½☆ 5.6.24
It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.
6.2 5.7 2446 34.1 26

Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG ★★★★☆ 3.2.16
A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.
9.9 9.7 1666 - -

Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style ★★★★☆ 8.3.23
Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.
8.4 7.1 2243 37.9 14

ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro ★★★★☆ 8.2.23
It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.
9.5 9.1 2498 - 185

Grand California 600 ★★★½☆ 2.1.20
Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.
15.8 16.7 3095 28.5 -

Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB ★★★☆☆ 30.3.22
Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.
9.1 9.0 2108 39.1 -

Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance ★★★★☆ 13.11.24
Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sibling car.
7.2 6.4 1836 44.5 73

VOLVO

EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus ★★★☆☆ 1.5.24
Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.
5.7 5.1 1779 - 179

C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate ★★★½☆ 13.4.22
A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.
4.4 3.6 2172 - 194

XC40 D4 AWD First Edition ★★★★½ 7.2.18
Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger siblings, if not better.
8.5 8.5 1735 43.8 -

XC60 D4 AWD R-Design ★★★½☆ 5.7.17
The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.
8.9 8.9 1836 48.9 -

XC90 B5 AWD Ultra Bright ★★★½☆ 2.7.25
Still a mature, versatile and wilfully unspectacular choice.
8.0 7.5 2117 37.0 -

V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design ★★★★½ 21.9.22
Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.
4.9 4.3 2036 38.0 51

V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design ★★★★½ 11.11.20
Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.
5.6 4.9 2109 41.9 -

XPENG

G6 RWD Standard Range ★★★½☆ 26.2.25
Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.
6.8 6.2 2067 3.3 208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Kia Stonic Early 2026
Second heavy update for Ford Puma rival comprises bold new look and plusher interior.

Land Rover 'Defender Sport' Mid-2027
Baby Defender will replace Discovery Sport and be more akin to the old Freelander 2.

Bentley 'Urban SUV' July 2027
Brand's first EV will sit beneath Bentayga with blocky styling, Porsche Cayenne EV platform.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love... KARTING

BY MATT PRIOR

Five seconds after climbing into a kart, I am entirely comfortable. My gloved hands find the steering wheel rim, my feet rest easily against the pedals and I am contented.

Five seconds after actually driving off, things are different: the vibration makes me feel sick and my glasses shake so much that my vision is blurred. It's loud, it's uncomfortable and I have no idea how I'm going to cope with half an hour of steering this heavy.

I've been karting on and off (mostly off) for nearly 40 years, sometimes in a rented kart, sometimes in my own one. But if the gap between stints has been anything more than a few months, I find the physicality of driving them takes serious reacquaintance.

No car, not a supercar nor a Caterham, drives like a kart, no matter how much a Mini Cooper's drive mode suggests it does.

I was going to say that karting is like a palate-cleansing sorbet, resetting your expectations between driving dishes, but it's too good for that, too appealing in its own right. It's more like the control sample among thousands of experiments that add complexity.

Here there's no power steering or torque vectoring and it isn't a crossover. The suspension is in chassis flex and your bones. It's driving distilled into its basic constituent parts and nothing more. And I find that irresistible.

It's true even in the cheapest, easiest karts to come by: hire karts. Because they're driven by reckless teenagers and hungover stag-do attendees, they're the heaviest and most robust karts there are. But still, if it doesn't help you go or bounce off a barrier, a hire kart won't be fitted with it. So even a kart made to accommodate anyone is only 2m long and 1.3m wide and weighs less than 150kg. And when it has been abused, crashed and fixed with zip ties and hope, it will still be more immediate and communicative than any road car.

Going wheel to wheel with your mates is great fun – and a great workout

Rent a kart, fire it up, hop in and have fun: it's that simple

"It's the purest form of driving; a genuine and unique freedom"

That purity is enviable. The controls – and this phrase isn't often literally true but is here – couldn't be simpler. You push your right foot to go, push your left foot to stop and turn the wheel to avoid things. That's it. (Yes, big-money gearbox karts are more complex; don't write in.)

And because the consequences of falling off are (usually) less severe than in a car, karting is the only time on track that I truly put meeting the scenery out of my mind.

As a result, the driving experience and the fun, while physically demanding, are unmatched. Karting is the purest form of driving; a genuine and, in my experience, unique driving freedom.

I don't feel the same way about any car and as such I will be karting on and off (mostly off) for as long as my bones will permit it.

What we did this week

ONE THEY MADE EARLIER

I spent my Saturday pretending to be a supercar owner for Lamborghini Day at Millbrook Proving Ground. Sat safely indoors was this gorgeous Countach, freshly recommissioned by Sant'Agata's in-house restoration business, Polo Storico. Amazing how compact it looked next to its modern equivalent, the Revuelto.

CHARLIE MARTIN

REGRESSION SESSION

Walking through Bourton-on-the-Water the other day, I was thrilled to discover the Cotswold Motoring Museum. Not only was my childhood hero Brum one of the exhibits, but also this was where the opening sequence to my favourite childhood TV show was filmed. Take note, Elon: autonomous crime-fighting cars have existed for 35 years already.

MURRAY SCULLION

WANNA LIFT?

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's a Kia EV4 being craned into a nice display location for the launch event. A car floating past in the air is definitely one of the more unusual sights to greet you during breakfast.

ILLYA VERPRAET

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